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The Sea Cadet;

OR,

The Rover of the Rigoletts.

A Romance of Green Shores and
Blue Waters.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER,"
"FREELANCE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN OF THE SEA.

STORM-CLOUDS of inky hue trailed their ragged edges almost upon the tree-tops, and spread an ominous gloom upon land and sea, shutting out the light of the dying day from the face of the earth, and casting over all a shadow that rivaled the night-time.

Landward, the wind howled mournfully through the forests, the thunder rolled incessantly, growing louder and more threatening, while ever and anon a gleam of brilliant lightning sev-

ered the heavens in twain, blinding the vision, and hastening the homeward-bound cattle to seek shelter, and sending the birds shrieking into the deep recesses of the woods to hide from the gathering storm.

Seaward, waves of ebony blackness rolled landward, their tops crested with foam, looking like huge shrouds in which to wrap the victims of an ill fated ship, dismasted, sinking, a wreck upon the waters, that was rolling shoreward to ruin and death.

Out upon the far-off sea burst the elements in fiercest rage, the winds shrieking as if in glee, at their power to utterly destroy what man had made, and howling above the devoted vessel, as if tauntingly chanting a requiem for the living that were soon to die amid that wild flood.

Miles away inland the storm had there also burst in fury, and its roar was distinctly audible to the group of men, who shrunk for shelter under an overhanging cliff, against which the mad sea flung its spray, while they strained their eyes to see the fate of the stanch ship, drawing nearer and nearer to its doom.

And thus the two storms swept toward each other, to meet like huge giants of the air in sav-

age combat, while the men upon the beach cowered down beneath the cliff for shelter, held to the spot by a fascination they could not resist, to watch that wrecked ship come ashore and hurl its human freight into the seething waters.

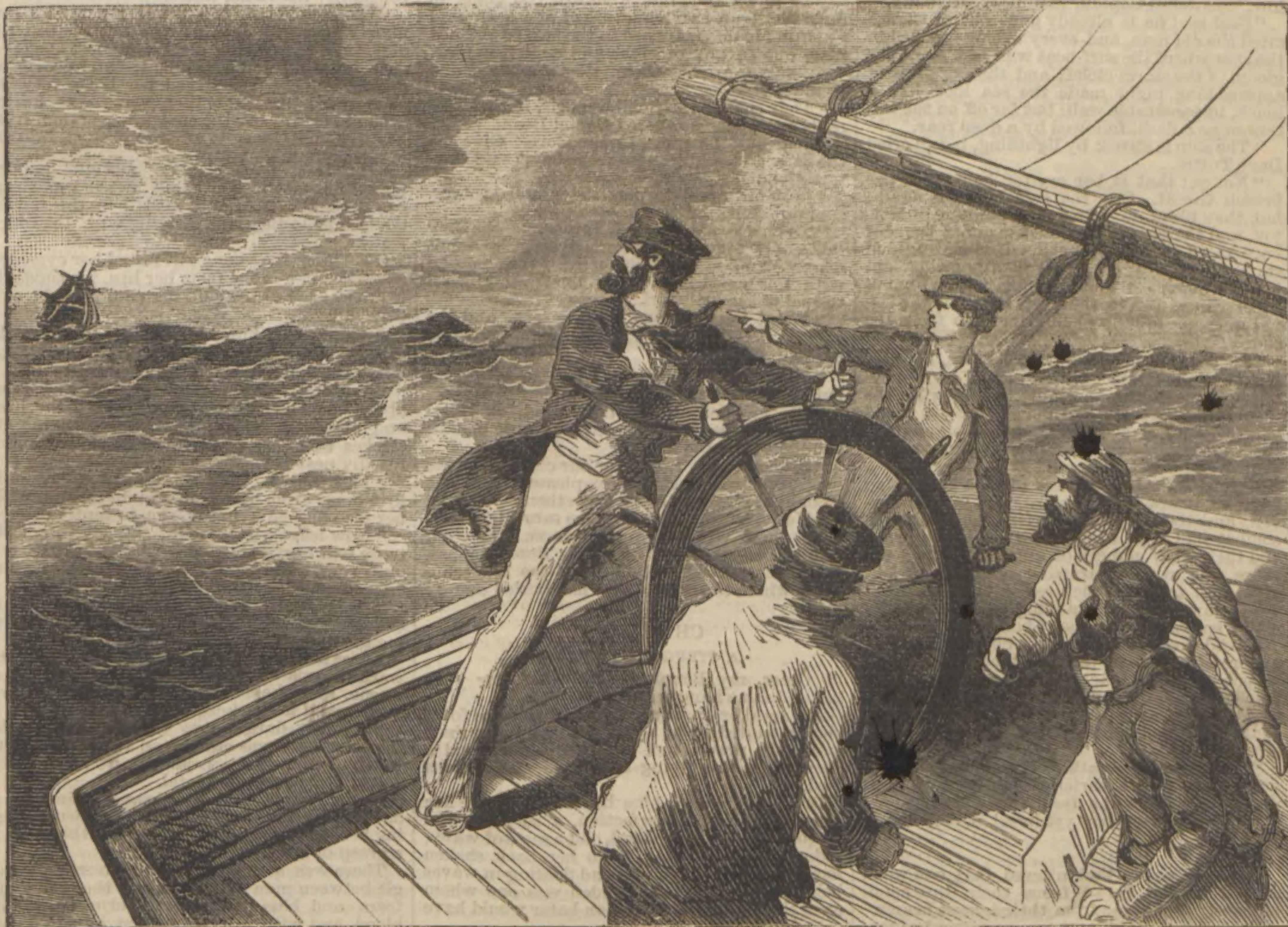
Presently a man on horseback came dashing along the beach, his eyes alternately bent upon the vessel, and the sweeping storm-clouds.

"Ho, men! yonder craft is in a bad way; can you do nothing to save her?" he called out, as he caught sight of the men huddled closely together, at the same time reining in his fiery horse.

"Nothing, sir; she's doomed to come ashore, and likely none will live to tell how she went down," answered an old man, who, with storm-coat and hat, seemed to be the leader of the party of fishermen—for such they were.

"Too bad! too bad! and I saw women on board, before it grew so dark. I will pay liberally for volunteers to go out in the surf-skiff yonder," and the horseman pointed to a long, narrow boat that lay back against the cliff.

"Captain Mountjoy, I do not wish your gold to urge me to save the life of a fellow-being, but I will go out if four of the boys will join me."



"THE BRIG! THE BRIG!" "BY HEAVEN! THAT BOY STILL HOLDS ON! IF SHE DOES RUN THIS CHANNEL WE ARE DOOMED."

The speaker stepped forward from the crowd and stood as though expecting to be at once seconded in his bold determination, and as he thus waited all eyes were turned upon him.

A tall, muscular young man he was, of about twenty. Dressed in white duck pants, blue woolen shirt, and a canvas tarpaulin upon his head, his frank, fearless face was the index to a noble character, and that he would dare any danger to aid those in distress his words proved.

"Bravo, Haze! Dean! Your heart's in the right place," cried the horseman, in admiration.

"Yes, his heart's all right, Captain Mountjoy, but his head's wrong to undertake such a foolish trip," said the old sailor, Daniel Dean, and called by his comrades "Commodore."

"The Commodore is right; the boy's a fool," another added.

"I'd rather be a fool than a scamp, Dave Tuttle," was the quick retort of the young man, turning his fearless glance upon the one whom he considered had insulted him.

Hot words would have followed at once, for Dave Tuttle was known as a reckless, dare-devil fellow, and he dropped his hand upon his knife; but Captain Mountjoy said, quickly:

"Hold on, lads; no quarreling now, but work; who goes with Hazel?"

Not a man spoke up in reply, and the captain said:

"Were it not for my shattered arm I would go, Hazel; but, surely, some one will volunteer," and it was noticed that the horseman's arm was carried in a sling, as though severely injured.

"If the boy is determined, I will go; I only hung back to save him," said the Commodore.

"No, father; there are younger men here who should go; but I ask no one to accompany me, as I know the chances are terribly against ever getting back. Only help me into the sea with the boat, and I will go alone."

"We'll do that, boy, but you are foolhardy," warned one of the group, and a score of strong arms seized the surf-boat and dragged it to the water.

Hazel Dean quickly stepped a stout, short mast, made the rudder fast, raised the tiny sprit-sail and sprung in, just as a huge wave raised the boat upon its crested bosom.

"I am going, too, Hazel," and the old Commodore made a spring to get in; but the youth shoved him off with an oar-blade, at the same time crying out:

"No, no, father; I must go alone. If I am lost, it will be in a good cause."

Away dashed the surf-skiff, bending far over under the pressure of the wind, and a wail of anguish broke from the lips of Daniel Dean.

"Oh, my boy, my boy! Captain Mountjoy, you have sent him to his death."

"God grant not, Dean, for he is a noble fellow," answered Captain Mountjoy, feelingly.

"See! see! he is already gone out of sight," cried the old man, and every eye was turned to the spot where the surf-boat was last seen; the gloom of the storm-clouds and the darkness of approaching night made the sea look like a black, impenetrable wall; but far off on the waters came a flash, followed by a deep roar.

"The ship is struck by lightning, lads," cried Dave Tuttle.

"Not so; that is her cry for help from her brazen throat. See, the signal comes again! but they plead in vain," said Captain Mountjoy, and the men shrunk back against the cliff once more, Ethan Mountjoy dismounting and standing in their midst, all silently gazing out into the blackness, and listening, with a kind of superstitious awe to the deep boom of the signal guns, pleadingly crying for help from the shore.

Like a statue stood old Daniel Dean, his eyes fixed upon the impenetrable gloom, as if striving to catch a glimpse of his boy, braving the desperate dangers he had daringly faced to aid others—faced, when the boldest fishermen on the coast hung back and refused to go, to what they deemed certain death.

At length the inky masses of clouds, drifting from landward and seaward, met in mid-heaven, and the shock was terrific, for the fierce combat had begun between the giant storms, and their fiery glances of anger illumined the shore and waters, drawing momentary, but vivid and frightful pictures of the dismayed vessel far out, and standing toward her the white, spectral-looking surf-boat.

A wild shriek, rather than a cheer burst from a score of throats at sight of that daring boat, a spot upon the black waters, and her brave helmsman heading for the towering hulk, which was being borne by each wave nearer and nearer the reef upon which she soon must go to destruction.

"She lives! she weathers the storm!" cried a voice, and again a shriek of joy went up from under that cliff, and a deep voice added:

"Yes, my brave boy yet lives! God, I thank Thee!"

"Amen!"

The deep voices that uttered that one word proved that it broke from their lips spontaneously, but came from their inmost hearts.

Down like a flood now came a torrent of water, and for a few moments the heavens seem-

ed rent in twain by the flames of lightning, and earth, sea and clouds were commingled in one vast, chaotic mass.

A moment more, and the storm-clouds from the sea, the greater in power, had triumphed and were driving the land-storm back over the shores, rooting up trees, unroofing hamlets and snapping and wrenching strong branches as if reveling in glee at finding something more tangible than water to spend its might upon.

Appalled by the mad war among the elements, the group of men stood in silence, shrinking away from its fury, and horrified at the ruin they knew must follow in the path of the hurricane.

But, through all, every heart was out upon the waters with that helpless wreck and tiny surf-boat, and every eye strained for a sight of the dread scene they knew must come out there amid that darkness.

And soon it came, for above the howling winds and roaring waves was heard a sound that those men knew but too well—a sound as of lost souls clamoring to escape from the jaws of hell.

A mighty crash of timbers, an instant's lull, and then the shrieks of the sea's victims as it engulfed them in its deadly, clammy embrace, to send them far down to graves amid the coral reefs.

But the shrieks of despair died away, and darkness and death followed, while the howling winds sounded like the mocking laughter of the storm over the victory it had won, the despair it had caused.

And still into that darkness peered that group of men, waiting, hoping, dreading, that the surf-skiff yet lived, though a ship had gone down.

"The surf-boat lives!"

The cry broke from the lips of the trembling old man, Daniel Dean, and his nerveless hand, quivering with excitement, pointed out upon the tempest-lashed waters.

"Hurrah! she lives!" broke from every throat, and, as one man, they rushed waist-deep into the mad surf, seized the little boat in their strong arms, and dragged it out upon the sands, with its occupants, three in number.

"And are these all?"

The question was asked by Captain Mountjoy, of Hazel Dean, as he sprung out of the skiff, which was half-filled with water.

"These two are all, and they are children; I found them in the cabin, and carried them to the skiff; a moment after the wreck went to pieces, and I barely escaped with these."

Such was the short and simple story, and Daniel Dean said, fervently:

"God bless you, my boy! You have done nobly, and dared what no man here would face."

"True, Hazel, you deserve all the praise that can be given you; but, what are you going to do with your two children of the sea?" and Captain Mountjoy turned to the two frightened little ones, a boy of eight and a girl of four, who stared around them, silent, amazed and trembling.

"They shall be my children, sir, if their parents are dead," answered Daniel Dean.

"One must be mine, Commodore. Give me the little girl, and you keep the boy," said Captain Mountjoy.

"Is it not cruel to part sister and brother, captain?"

"They are not related, father, so the boy said—only fellow-passengers, though he seems deeply attached to the little girl. Will you go with this gentleman, little one?" and Hazel turned to the little girl.

"Papa! papa!" came the low cry, and she was taken in the arms of the strong man, while the boy said:

"You saved my life, sir; I will go with you; but I can see little Ruby, can't I?"

"Oh yes; often, my boy," and, as Hazel Dean spoke the moon pierced the dark clouds, and lighted up the scene.

"A good omen, Hazel, for our children of the sea," said Captain Mountjoy, pleasantly, as the moonlight streamed down upon them.

"Yes, captain; but see! The same light falls upon these white, upturned faces," and old Daniel Dean pointed to half a dozen human forms that now lay dead upon the glittering sands where the cruel waves had hurled them.

CHAPTER II.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

"COME, my Bonnie Bessie, come, for your life and mine hang on your fleetness."

The speaker was a young girl of perhaps fourteen, mounted upon a wiry sorrel mare, that, under the pressure of her rider's voice, and a keen whip, was flying along the sands like a bird.

Dressed in a dark-blue habit that fitted her exquisite form to perfection, a soft hat and feather sheltering her head, and a mass of wavy, red-gold hair hanging down her back, shaken loose by her rapid riding, and floating in waves below her saddle, the maiden was one whom even the most violent woman-hater would have called beautiful.

Alone she had ridden out, as was often her

wont, and had taken her favorite path, leading along the sands, and under the shelter of the cliff that overhung the blue waters of the Gulf, along the shores of which were the homes of several wealthy planters, and the hamlets of the more humble fishermen.

After gaining the beach, by a pathway through the cliff, she would dash along the sands for several miles, to the next break in the solid bank, where she could ascend to the highway above, that ran along the level plateau.

Frequently, for the very daring of the thing, she would race with the incoming tide, well knowing that an accident to her horse might prove fatal, for she would give herself barely time to gain the pass, and often had been sprinkled by the dash of the waters, as she reached the point of safety.

When presented to the reader, she had, to her horror, reached the other break in the cliff to find it closed.

The waves had undermined the lofty bank, and toppling over, it had securely barred the pathway almost against human feet, though, with a great effort, she might have secured her own safety at the sacrifice of her horse.

"No, Bonnie Bess, I will not leave you to such a fate; we will risk the danger together, but you must fly like the wind," she had bravely said, and turning the frightened animal, for it seemed to fully realize the danger also, she sprung away at full speed.

"Ah, my Bess, why do you not fly?" cried the maiden, as the spray was thrown around her, drenching her to the skin, and each successive wave was coming higher and higher, as though longing to infold her in its embrace.

"Mary Mother! I fear we are doomed!" again cried the girl, as a wave almost washed the mare's feet from under her, and keenly the lash descended upon the straining, flying animal, for the goal of safety was yet half a mile away.

Another wave, ruder, higher than the others, caused Bonnie Bess to stagger, plunge and almost go down, for it swept up to the stirrup of the fair rider.

And still another wave swept boldly in, and the brave animal was carried off her feet; but by a mighty effort her footing was regained, and once more she bounded forward, her eyes starting, her head thrust forward, and whole form quivering with fright.

Again came a rolling torrent of water, and in despair the rider checked her horse to meet it, while she glanced hopefully and yet hopelessly at the smooth cliff sides towering thirty feet above her.

With another despairing effort the splendid beast saved herself from the outward flow, and once more struggled on, through water now constantly above her knees.

"Oh, Bessie, we can never reach it; a few more waves will dash us to death against the cliff," and the fearless girl almost lost her presence of mind for a moment; but, recovering herself quickly, she urged her horse forward once more, until another wave was hurled around her, raising the struggling animal from her feet, and, in spite of every effort, bearing her back upon its bosom.

"Oh, God, have mercy!" and the maiden buried her face in her hands as she was swept out upon the flood, still seated in the saddle, while Bonnie Bess was striving with the rough waters.

Once more the young girl raised her eyes, and a startled cry broke from her lips, for suddenly over the edge of the cliff she caught sight of a dark object.

A moment it hung in mid-air, and then descended with lightning rapidity, to sink beneath the waters with a heavy plunge.

Breathlessly the maiden waited, and then, above the whitened waters, appeared the head and shoulders of a man, who, with mighty strokes with his powerful arms was drawing rapidly near her.

"Throw aside your skirt and hat," came in firm tones from the bold swimmer, and, while her face flushed crimson, she instantly obeyed.

"Now leave your saddle! Be careful, or the mare will hurt you with her hoofs," came a second order, and, leaving her saddle, the maiden trusted herself to the merciless waves.

"Back, Bessie, back!" she suddenly cried, as she saw that the frightened animal was following her and endangering her with her hoofs.

An expert swimmer, the maiden swam toward the one who had so bravely come to her rescue, and the next moment his strong arm was around her slender waist.

But a new danger now threatened them, for the poor mare was close upon them, struggling wildly, and a stroke from her iron-shod hoofs would prove instantly fatal.

Appreciating this, the brave swimmer at once released his hold upon the maiden, thrusting her away from him, and seized the mare in a grasp of iron.

There was a momentary and terrible struggle between man and beast, and then the white foam and blue waters were crimsoned with blood, and with a moan almost human, brave Bonnie Bess sunk beneath the waves.

"Oh, Roy, what have you done?" cried the maiden.

"It was necessary, Ruby; I drove my hunting-knife to her heart; but come, the chances are strongly against us yet."

The maiden shuddered, as if horrified at the terrible death of her faithful pet, but relinquished herself to the grasp of the one who had risked his life to come to her aid, and aiding him all in her power, the two headed up the coast toward the opening in the cliff, yet the eighth of a mile distant.

An expert and powerful swimmer, the man kept out of the surf, holding his fair companion firmly in his grasp, and at the same time steadily, yet slowly, swimming toward the place of safety.

A hard, terrible swim it was in those eddying, swirling waters, weighted down as they were by their clothes, but, at last, they were opposite the cut in the cliff, and began to head for the shore.

At this point the surf was rolling high and furiously, for the tide was rushing in, driven by the wind, which was blowing half a gale.

"Now, Ruby, bend every energy, for we shall need it," said the man, and nerving himself for the struggle, they went shoreward on a huge, foam-capped wave.

A mighty effort, a fierce encounter with the receding waters, a touch of their feet upon the sands, another powerful struggle against being borne back into the sea, and they were saved—the maiden unconscious, the man with barely strength enough left to stagger beyond the reach of the waves, and sink down with the precious life he had snatched from the merciless ocean.

CHAPTER III. THE RIVALS.

UPON the shores, washed by the adjacent waters of the Mexican sea, or Gulf, still stands a plantation home, built a century ago.

Around its stretch far away thousands of acres of land, and in front of it roll the dark blue waters, until they are lost in the dim distance.

Orange groves, magnolia forests, and live oaks are upon every hand along the shores, and flowers innumerable send forth their fragrance floating upon the air, while the mansion itself, the rows of negro quarters far back, and all around denote that it is the home of wealth and refinement.

In that pleasant home, over half a century ago, dwelt Captain Mountjoy, and it is of that time I would write, for there the corsair flag floated over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and rakish pirate schooners, under cruel chiefs, made war upon the shipping of the world, and even measured their strength with armed cruisers, until their ill-gotten fame now forms the theme for many a poem and romance.

A naval officer of the United States, wounded in a battle with Cuban pirates, Captain Mountjoy had retired to his home on the Gulf, where dwelt his wife and only child, a boy of ten.

But, at the threshold of his door, grief welcomed him upon his return, for his beautiful wife had passed away, and then lay in the family burying-ground among the magnolias, and his little son was under the care of the old servants.

A few weeks after his return the scene occurs that opens this story, when, at the urging of Captain Mountjoy, Hazel Dean went out alone in the mad storm, to the wrecked ship, and saved from it two souls, all that escaped that fearful night of danger and death.

Those two, a boy and a girl, at once found homes; the former in the humble cabin of the old fisherman, "Commodore," and the other in the elegant mansion of Ethan Mountjoy.

By inquiry, Captain Mountjoy had learned who his adopted daughter was, and was delighted to discover that her parents were wealthy, of good birth, and from Boston, and that this child was heiress to their estates, for they had gone down with the wreck.

As for Roy, the boy adopted by Hazel Dean, nothing was really known, though the little fellow said he had taken passage with his father on the clipper ship, which was bound for the West Indies, but more, Roy either did not know, or, if knowing, would not tell, and his past remained a mystery to those who gave him shelter.

On the voyage over, the children had become firm friends, and had not the boy held the little girl back in the cabin, she would have gone on deck and shared the fate of all the rest, who were lost on that eventful night.

Becoming devotedly attached to his young charge, Hazel Dean took him with him in his fishing cruises, and then to New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, where he disposed of his piscatorial freight. Little Roy thus soon became an expert sailor, and won the admiration of all the coast fishermen by his daring and skill.

But every Sunday Roy devoted to a visit to Magnolia Retreat, the home of Captain Mountjoy, to see little Ruby, and he was always warmly welcomed by the planter, who, in securing a tutor for his son Albert, and youthful ward, urged that Hazel Dean should allow the

boy to study with them, a request that was willingly granted.

And thus, first over their school-books, and then in their sports as young huntsmen, began a rivalry between Roy Dean and Albert Mountjoy, that, as they grew older and both looked upon Ruby with loving eyes, turned their regard for each other into dislike, and then into the bitterest hatred—a hatred that went with them to the grave, and brought mutual anguish to both.

At length the time came for Albert Mountjoy to leave his home, for he had received a midshipman's berth in the navy, and, determined not to leave behind him so dangerous a rival as Roy Dean, he plotted to in some way injure him in the esteem of his father and Ruby, so that he would not be allowed to visit at Magnolia Retreat.

To carry out this vile purpose he enlisted in his behalf the evil-disposed fisherman, Dave Tuttle, who had never been friendly with Hazel Dean, and had bestowed his dislike upon Roy as well.

Having begun the plot against Roy, Albert Mountjoy was determined to stop at nothing to be rid of his rival, and was readily influenced by Dave Tuttle into a plan to have him carried off by a band of smugglers who were known to have their haunt somewhere upon the coast.

Unsuspecting treachery, poor Roy fell into the trap laid for him, which was a letter asking him to come up that night to Magnolia Retreat.

Walking along the beach, wholly unconscious of impending danger, Roy Dean was suddenly set upon by three men in seamen's garb, and in spite of a fierce resistance, was overpowered, flung into a boat in waiting, and carried on board a swift-sailing sloop that at once stood out to sea.

The following day a rumor was floating through the fishermen's hamlet that nearly drove the old Commodore and Hazel mad, for it was to the effect that Dave Tuttle had seen Roy Dean in conversation with a band of coast smugglers, and heard him say that he would join them, after which he had gone off in their vessel.

Hazel sought Dave Tuttle, and severe words followed between the two men; but Roy was missing, and there seemed no reason why Dave should tell a story, while several fishermen had seen the smuggler sloop off the coast the night before.

And quickly the rumor went to Magnolia Retreat, to be doubted by Captain Mountjoy, and indignantly denied by Ruby, who was rapidly budding forth into lovely maidenhood.

But, Albert Mountjoy said he had also seen Roy in the smugglers' boat, and told of a number of little things that led him to believe his rival had at last gone to the bad.

With a happy heart, at having successfully gotten rid of Roy, Albert Mountjoy left Magnolia Retreat for New Orleans where he was to join his vessel, little caring what fate might befall the one he had professed to call friend, and whom he had so vilely treated.

CHAPTER IV.

A VOICE FROM THE SEA.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some seven months after the departure of Albert Mountjoy to become a midshipman, a trim-looking brig-of-war, flying the American flag, was cruising before a light wind, along the shores of the Mexican Gulf, and at a point now known as the coast of Florida.

Landward were visible numerous reefs, fatal to vessels should they not avoid them, and beyond were several green islands, forming a kind of chain putting out from the mainland.

As the wind was off shore, the heavens cloudless, and every appearance of a calm night, the brig-of-war swept up into the wind and came to anchor, a league from the nearest island, which presented a high, solid cliff toward the sea, but beyond seemed overgrown with luxuriant foliage.

As the sun went down a group of young officers gathered upon the quarter-deck, and while listening to the songs of the sailors forward, indulged in smoking their fragrant cigars, and now and then remarking upon the exquisite beauty of the night, for above the distant horizon, and casting a path of gold over the rippling waters, the

"Crescent moon was sailing into the ether,
Conveyed by fleets of stars upon her way."

Unmindful of the flying time the group sat until a late hour, and then one, more practical than romantic, made a move to retire for the night.

"Not yet, Mountjoy, not yet," cried several voices.

"How can you leave this lovely scene, Al?" asked one, while another cried, as the young midshipman still persisted in retiring:

"Give us a song first, Mountjoy."

"Yes, a song! a song!" called out several, and seizing a Spanish guitar that had lain idle upon the deck, Albert Mountjoy sang in a rich barytone the "Pirate's Serenade," his messmates joining in the chorus.

As the last line died away in harmony across the waters, there came a sudden hail that brought all to their feet:

"Brig, ahoy!"

No boat was visible, no sail in sight, and the island was miles away.

"Hailed by Neptune!" exclaimed a lively middy.

"Or by the Flying Dutchman," said another, with a certain awe in his tone.

"Brig, ahoy!"

Again rung out the hail, but from whence had it come?

None could tell, and all stood in silence, and some in superstitious dread, while the sailors, who had also been startled by the strange hail, huddled together, confident that some ghostly being was near them, perhaps the spirit of a departed messmate whose soul was ill at ease, since having gone on a cruise to "Davy Jones's Locker."

"What is it, young gentlemen, that causes you to stand in startled tableau?"

It was the brig's captain that spoke, a gray-haired old seaman with stern, yet kind face, and his coming broke the spell upon the group of young officers.

"We were startled by a hail, sir, and it came from—Neptune only knows where," said a junior lieutenant.

The keen eyes of the captain swept the horizon quickly, but nowhere did his vision meet an object from whence the sound could have come.

"A hail, did you say?" he asked, seemingly doubting.

The answer came at once, and as before none could tell from whence:

"Brig, ahoy!"

All seemed thoroughly mystified now, though the captain recovered at once, and answered in a loud tone:

"Ahoy! Who hails?"

"Send a boat; I am in danger."

The voice that answered seemed fainter than before, and came from the water a hundred fathoms away, and off the starboard bow.

"Lower away the third cutter! Lively, lads, lively!" ordered the captain, and in a moment's time a boat was speeding through the water in the direction from whence had come the hail.

Watching the boat those on the brig saw the crew cease rowing and draw a form out of the water, while with quick stroke they pulled again for the vessel.

"Who is it, Lennox?" called out the captain to the young lieutenant in charge.

"A poor devil, sir, who had nothing between him and the bottom of the sea; he seems unconscious."

Tenderly the form of a man was raised from the boat and borne into the cabin, the captain and surgeon following.

A half-dressed, emaciated and haggard form was presented to the eyes of the lookers-on, as the cabin light fell full upon him, lying full length upon the lounge, his eyes open, his lips moving, yet apparently too weak to speak.

A draught of brandy and hard rubbing soon revived the waif from the waves, and in half an hour he was able to sit up, and said, with a faint smile:

"I was weaker than I supposed; had your boat not reached me when it did, I should have gone under."

"How is it that you were in the water, my lad?" asked the captain, in a kindly tone.

"I was trying to reach the brig, sir; I saw you anchor in the afternoon and took the chances."

"Do you reside on the coast?"

"Ah, no, sir, for there are no residents there, only smugglers."

"Ha! Smugglers you say?"

"Yes, sir; the island, a league off the starboard bow, is the retreat of Captain Darke and his band."

"This is indeed news; and are you a member of that band, turned traitor to save your own neck?"

The haggard face flushed at the captain's words, and the sunken eyes flashed with anger; but he answered in a calm, but decided voice:

"I am neither a smuggler nor a traitor."

There was something in the face of the one before him, pinched with suffering as it was, that won the admiration of Captain Delorme, and he said, quickly:

"Pardon me, I meant not to offend; you have been a prisoner, perhaps?"

"I have, sir; and for seven months I have been almost starved to death and held in irons to force me to become one of the band."

"And where did they capture you?"

"I was walking on the beach one night, going to visit some friends, when I was set upon and carried off by the smugglers, who professed to have some grudge against me, but would spare my life if I would join their band."

My refusal caused them to take me to their island retreat to starve me into subjection; but seeing your vessel, sir, I made a desperate effort, severed the irons that bound my feet, and swam out to you, anxious to lead your gallant crew against those devils."

"I am a good swimmer, but I was weak from confinement and want of food, and these weight-

ed me down," and he pointed to the iron shackles around his ankles.

"My poor boy, you have indeed suffered. I will have those irons removed at once, and tomorrow we will move upon the smugglers, under your guidance."

"It will be too late, for their vessel leaves tomorrow on another cruise; to-night I can lead the boats through a pass in the reef and you can make the attack."

"But, are you able to—"

"Oh, yes, sir; as soon as I have had something to eat I will be all right— Ha! *Albert Mountjoy!*"

"Great God! *Roy Dean!*"

The last speaker was Midshipman Albert Mountjoy, who had entered the cabin, little dreaming of the sight that would meet his gaze, and he started back, a cry of surprise on his lips, a look of horror upon his face.

And thus these two rivals gazed into the other's eyes, an unfathomable look creeping over the face of each.

CHAPTER V.

THE SMUGGLERS' ISLE.

"WHAT! you know this young man, then, Mountjoy?" and Captain Delorme of the *Sleuthhound* turned to the young midshipman, who since his entrance into the navy had been upon his vessel prosecuting his studies with a class of half a score other middies, for that was before the time of the Annapolis Naval Academy.

Albert Mountjoy was quick-witted, and though he had received a severe shock in seeing Roy Dean, for he had believed and hoped that he was dead, he rallied quickly, and determined to brazen the matter out, so he said earnestly, at the same time stepping forward and offering his hand to the youth he had so wronged:

"Know him, sir? Indeed I do, for our homes are not a league apart; but I believed him captured by smugglers, though some said he had voluntarily joined them."

"Those that so said little knew me, Albert, and I thank you for not believing with them, for I was captured by Captain Darke's band, and only escaped to-night, after a desperate swim from the island," and Roy Dean took the proffered hand, yet with no very great warmth of friendship in his manner.

"Well, I am glad that you have come out all right, and you shall soon have revenge upon your captors. Mountjoy, tell my steward to bring refreshments here at once, and, Mr. Lennox have the boats called alongside for a land expedition," ordered Captain Delorme.

"May I offer a suggestion, sir?" asked Roy, modestly.

"Certainly, my lad."

"Well, sir, that the smugglers are watching your vessel there is no doubt, and boats leaving her here would be at once seen; but, by getting under way and standing out to sea for some distance you will throw them off their guard, and can then, with the present breeze, run down upon the starboard tack to the island below and there get good anchorage, while the crews can start under the shelter of the land and surprise the outlaws."

"Good advice, my lad; but, who knows these waters?"

"I do, sir; my father and brother are fishermen, as I am, and we often run down here to fish for the Pensacola market; besides the smugglers have chained me in a boat each day and made me fish for them, until I know the channels as I do the coast where I live."

"Then I will be guided wholly by you, and will stand at once to sea. Ah, here are refreshments for you, and while you strengthen yourself with food, I will attend to the arrangements for the expedition," and Captain Delorme left the cabin, while with hearty good will Roy Dean set to work upon what the steward had set before him, and in half an hour felt like a new being.

After running seaward until he felt the brig was not visible from the island, Captain Delorme put his helm aport, and headed down the coast for an hour, running close in under the shelter of a heavily-wooded island.

Here the anchor was let fall, and, under the pilotage of Roy Dean four boats left the brig's side, Lieutenant Lennox going in command of the expedition, and Albert Mountjoy being in charge of the captain's gig.

With muffled oars and steady stroke, the boats held on their way, going in single file, and keeping close in under the shadow of the island, until they were forced to row across the bright moonlit expanse of sea that divided them from the retreat of the smugglers.

Here they had to risk discovery, and boldly swept across, and once more gained the shadow of the tree-bordered land, this time the island of the smuggler band.

Around them were reefs, and the channel was one not easily followed, but unerringly Roy Dean held on his way until they rounded a sandy point jutting out into the sound, or inlet, for they were upon the inner side of the isle, toward the mainland.

Rounding this point, or bar of sand, the boats passed through a narrow passageway and held steadily on in the darkness, for the trees upon

either shore now cast a shadow upon the waters.

"We have surprised them, sir, or—"

"Or what, Mr. Dean?" asked Lieutenant Lennox, as Roy paused.

"Or they have discovered us and are laying in ambush to greet us."

"We must take those chances, my lad; do you not see an object moving yonder? There, in that belt of moonlight between the trees?"

"Yes, sir; it is the sentinel; there are but two on duty, the other one being upon the sea side of the island, near where I was confined in a cave; we are safe," exultingly said Roy Dean, and he ran the cutter in shore upon a sandy beach, the other boats noiselessly following.

A moment more and the half hundred men had landed, and stood awaiting the order of their lieutenant, or rather of Roy Dean, for he seemed the acknowledged leader.

"Yonder lies the sloop and schooner, sir, and there are not more than a dozen men on board of them, the balance of the band being in their cabins, which lie in behind that hill, you see there, with the tall pine on top," and Roy pointed out the localities named.

"Then we must divide our force, attacking both at the same time?"

"Yes, sir; half a dozen men are enough to send after the sloop, a dozen can take the schooner, and the remainder can move against the cabins, for there are over a score of smugglers there."

"A good idea; now to flank that sentinel."

"I will attend to him, sir; just wait here, please," and Roy slipped away in the darkness, while the crew, standing in the shadow of the trees, watched the sentinel as he paced to and fro in the moonlight, about a hundred yards away.

It seemed an age to wait, but at last a stifled cry arose to every lip, as, when the sentinel had once more turned his back to a clump of trees in his weary beat to and fro, a form glided out of the thicket's shadow, approached the unsuspecting man, and the next moment sprung upon him like a panther upon his prey.

A fierce struggle followed, and then a dark form arose from the ground. It was Roy Dean, for the smuggler had been dressed in white.

A faint whistle was then heard, and the *Sleuthhound's* crew moved on like specters in the gloom, until they came suddenly upon Roy Dean awaiting them.

"He did not see me, and I frightened him into submission to being bound and gagged," he said, quietly.

"You did not kill him then?"

"Oh no; I never would take human life unnecessarily, Lieutenant Lennox."

"You are right. Now that the coast is clear, what do you advise, for Mountjoy will lead the party against the schooner, and Midshipman Wilber will attack the sloop."

"Yonder lie the two vessels, half a cable's length apart. When they hear a signal from us, let them attack," said Roy, and he moved away, followed by Lieutenant Lennox and his party, while the two midshipmen and their men remained in the thicket to await the signal for their attack.

It soon came, a loud, shrill whistle, and with cheers the three little bands rushed forward, Roy Dean and Lieutenant Lennox leading their men directly upon the half-dozen cabins, mostly built out of ship timber, situated under the shelter of the high, wooded cliffs that faced the sea.

That it was a perfect surprise was evident, for the smugglers rushed out of their cabins half-dressed, some of them unarmed, to meet a fierce enemy, bent upon their destruction.

But some of the outlaws were not men to submit tamely, for under the name of smugglers they had been guilty of piracies; that their necks were in a noose they well knew; hence they fought to the bitter end, while others of their number cried lustily for mercy.

"Aha, my fine fellow, we owe this to you!" cried a burly man, whom Roy Dean recognized as the second in command of the band, and he ran upon the youth, a cutlass in hand.

Fred Lennox heard his words, and saw his act, but was unable to do more than spring forward and endeavor to cross the cutlass of the smuggler; but Roy quickly raised his pistol, and with the report the outlaw sprung into the air and fell dead, the bullet having pierced his heart.

"Well done, my brave lad! Now the victory is ours!" cried the dashing lieutenant, and upon all sides now came cries for mercy from the outlaws.

"Mountjoy is crying for help, sir!" suddenly called out Roy Dean, and again came the cry:

"Ho, the *Sleuthhounds!* help here!"

"Come, men, follow me!" called out Lieutenant Lennox, and away dashed a score of men to the inlet, their way lighted by the flames bursting from the burning sloop.

But, to their horror, the *Sleuthhounds* discovered the schooner standing out of the basin under full sail, and upon her decks a dozen smugglers, with Albert Mountjoy and several of his crew held as prisoners.

"To the rescue!" cried Fred Lennox, and they were soon at the beach, where lay several dead and wounded men, of both smugglers and sailors from the *Sleuthhound*, and two prisoners, held by Midshipman Wilber and the remainder of the party that started under him and Mountjoy.

"There goes the schooner, lieutenant, and Mountjoy and three of our men prisoners," called out the middy.

"How did it happen, Wilber?"

"Well, sir, when I boarded the sloop the crew ran up from the hold, sprung overboard and swam to the schooner which Mountjoy just then reached."

"As he touched the deck a tall man came out of the cabin, seized Mountjoy and the three men at his back, and, aided by his crew, slipped the cable and shoved off in less time than it takes to tell, while I ran around and attacked the smugglers that had to land, being unable to reach the schooner."

"It is Captain Darke himself; I recognize him at the wheel, and he must have slept on board the schooner," said Roy Dean, glancing through his night-glass.

"Then we must pursue in the boats. You, Wilber, remain here with half the men and look after the prisoners, wounded and booty, and we will give chase; if the boats cannot catch yonder daring fellow, the brig can," and away went Fred Lennox and his party in a full run for the boats, two of which were soon in pursuit of the flying schooner, which was now rounding the sandy bar into the inlet or sound.

"The wind is freshening, sir, and we are going to have a storm—see!" and Roy Dean pointed to the black clouds skurrying across the heavens from seaward.

"And this is a bad place for a vessel in a blow, is it not?"

"It is, sir, for there is no safe anchorage, with the wind off the sea, except the smugglers' basin, and there is not water enough there for the brig to run in."

"Then head for the brig at once, and I will signal for them to meet us," and several volleys of musketry were fired in rapid succession.

"The schooner is putting about, sir," said the coxswain, who was in the bow.

"True; he is coming back to surrender, having discovered the brig."

"No, Lieutenant Lennox, I know Darke the Smuggler too well for that; he sees the brig, and is putting back to run out of the passage through the reefs at the head of the islands."

"But he is heading directly for us, Dean."

"Then he intends to run us down," was the cool answer of Roy Dean, and his words sent a thrill of horror through all who heard them.

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD CHASE.

THAT Darke the Smuggler had determined upon one of two things—either to return and surrender to the boats or to run them down—was evident, for the sharp bows of his schooner were headed directly for them, and, under an eight-knot breeze the small but fleet craft was coming on at a speed that would crush into atoms whichever of the cutters was in the way.

"Do you think he would really attempt to destroy us?" asked Fred Lennox, doubtingly.

"He certainly will; he is outlawed as a coast pirate as well as smuggler, and knows that he will be hanged if taken. See, he heads directly for us, but if we separate he can run down but one, and we both must take the chances of his favor," was the almost indifferent remark of Roy Dean, whose coolness won the admiration of the lieutenant as well as the men, the former replying:

"Then we will divide; ho! the third cutter!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the officer in charge.

"Drag off about fifty feet from us, and if the schooner heads for you fire a volley upon her decks, and then leap into the water."

"Ay, ay, lieutenant."

"You forget Midshipman Mountjoy and—"

"True, Dean, I am thankful for your remembering them," and he called out to the officer of the third cutter to spring with his men into the sea, but not to fire, if the schooner bore down upon them, an order he also gave to his own crew.

Like a thing of life flying over the waters, the schooner now came rushing down upon the boats, heading so as to deceive both as to which was to be the unfortunate object of the schooner's vicious attack.

At the helm the tall form of Captain Darke was visible, and by his side stood Albert Mountjoy and his men, while the smuggler crew were ranged behind, apparently protecting themselves behind the sailors of the *Sleuthhound* from the fire of the boats, which they evidently anticipated.

The smuggler chief was a tall, wiry-built man of perhaps forty, with a dark face, and black hair and mustache.

His eyes were large, keen, and very bright, and his face was calm and fearless; in fact, he would have been called a handsome man were it not for the reckless and sinister expression upon his face.

Dressed neatly in a kind of undress uniform, he presented a striking appearance as he stood at the wheel of his little schooner, which, under his daring command, had become famous along the Gulf coast for smuggling, and many said for piracies, too.

"Now, my young middy, if you have friends in that boat off our starboard bow; look to see them die," said Captain Darke, with a sinister smile.

Albert Mountjoy gazed an instant ahead, and then said:

"And if I have enemies?"

"Then you will be rid of them, too," was the calm response.

The midshipman glanced at the three men of his crew, who stood near him, and, while an evil glitter came into his eyes, leaned forward, and whispered in the smuggler's ear:

"I have enemies in that boat off the larboard* bow; run it down."

There was something so cruel in the tone in which the midshipman spoke, that Captain Darke turned his eyes full upon him, and said:

"You would make a good pirate, young man; I like a man of your caliber for a villain, and if the world goes hard with you look up Darke, the Smuggler, and he will give you a berth."

"You are insulting, sir," broke angrily from the lips of Mountjoy.

"I will be obliging, too; the larboard boat is doomed."

As he spoke the smuggler captain suddenly gave his wheel a turn, and the sharp bows dashed for the cutter in which were Fred Lennox and Roy Dean.

"Now, men!"

The order of the lieutenant was not an instant too soon, for the sharp bow was almost upon them, and a dozen forms leaped into the waters and sunk far down below the waves, not hearing the crash of timbers that followed, as the flying schooner cut the boat in twain, staggered a second under the shock, and then passed swiftly on.

"That officer knew what he was about; had they remained in the boat none would have escaped death. Ho, men! pour a volley into that other boat, and then pepper those fellows as they rise. Your enemy may yet go under," and with the last remark Captain Darke turned smilingly toward Albert Mountjoy, who had become very pale.

The crew of the schooner quickly raised their muskets and after firing into the remaining boat, turned their guns upon the dark objects as they arose upon the waves, and with a bullet through their brains several poor fellows sunk to rise no more.

But the third cutter bore quickly down among the surviving men, and they were picked up, all but three who had sunk forever.

"Now, by Heaven, the Sleuthhound must run yonder devil to his lair," gritted Fred Lennox, as he held forth his hand for Roy Dean, who was already at the boat, to draw him in.

"It was a cowardly act; but we escaped better than I expected; but I must reach the brig, sir, before this storm breaks," and Roy Dean glanced at the darkening heavens.

"Pull with a will, men; we are not out of danger," cried the lieutenant, and the cutter bounded over the rough waters with increased speed, heading for the brig, which was a mile distant, and slowly feeling its way along the shore of the lower island, for Captain Delorme knew well that he was in a dangerous locality for a vessel without a pilot, but was coming as fast as he dared, to the aid of the crew in the boats.

"As I live! there is but one boat returning! Can that young fellow have led them into a trap, after all?" cried Captain Delorme, anxiously, as he beheld only the third cutter approaching the brig.

"I think not, sir; perhaps the others are at the island, and this one is returning with the news," said an old lieutenant.

"But, why give the signal agreed upon for danger? I do not wish to doubt that lad, for his face is too noble to do wrong, but I am sadly in the dark as to what this means. By Jupiter, how these clouds thicken. I tell you, I do not half like the way affairs are going to-night," and the captain appeared most anxious. No wonder, for over half of his crew had gone off in the boats, on a dangerous expedition, led by a strange pilot, a mere boy in years, and now only the third cutter was returning, crowded with men, and a storm was rising with no means of finding a safe anchorage, or even the way out to sea.

"The schooner is out of sight, sir," reported a man from aloft.

"And Lieutenant Lennox is in that boat, sir; and the young pilot, too, sir; I saw them both, as the moon came from behind a cloud," said the old lieutenant.

"Then I misjudged the boy; but, what can have happened?"

"Ho, the Sleuthhound!"

The hail came across the waters, and in the voice of Fred Lennox.

* Now port, but at that time called larboard.—THE AUTHOR.

"Yes; Lennox is safe; I would know his voice among a thousand," said Captain Delorme, and he sung out in his own deep tones:

"Ay, ay, Lennox!"

"Throw us a rope and pick us up as you pass. Crowd on sail for a hot chase!"

"Ay, ay," answered the captain, and the brig's decks were at once a scene of excitement, while the cutter put about, shipped its oars, and lay in readiness to be picked up.

Nearer glided the brig; the rope was skillfully thrown and caught, and a moment after Fred Lennox and Roy Dean stood upon the quarter-deck.

"Well, Lennox, how is this?" asked the captain, somewhat sternly.

"The island is in our possession, sir, with Midshipman Wilber in charge; the sloop was burned, and the schooner escaped, carrying off Midshipman Mountjoy and three men as prisoners, and it is under the command of Darke, the Smuggler, who, seeing the brig, put about and ran our boat down, losing for us three men."

"You have done well; how many men did you lose on the island?"

"Four killed and half a dozen wounded; Dean, here, killed the second in command, and he says he can run the schooner down if you will let him pilot the brig."

"Willingly; and you say that Mountjoy is on the schooner?"

"Yes, sir, with three men."

"But this is a dangerous place, young man?" and Captain Delorme turned to Roy.

"It is indeed, sir; but I know these waters well. The schooner has run up the island to try to beat to sea through the reefs, but with the wind from this quarter it cannot do so, and we can catch her at the head of the island," Roy confidently assumed.

"Very well; take the helm, and, as soon as we come in sight of the smuggler, we will open on him with the bow guns."

"You forget, sir, that Midshipman Mountjoy is on board," suggested the generous young fisherman, in remarkable contrast to the act of his rival, who sought his destruction.

Carrying considerable canvas, in spite of the increasing gale, the Sleuthhound swept up the sound like a race-horse, and soon rounded the bar putting out from the smugglers' island.

Then, far away, the moonlight, momentarily penetrating the darkening heavens, glimmered upon a white sail, and a score of voices called out:

"The schooner! the schooner!"

Although here and there were visible reefs, covered with surges of foaming water, Roy Dean held the helm with no faltering hand, and with his keen eyes watching the channel ahead, he kept on his way with a daring that proved he possessed a nerve and confidence in himself far beyond his years.

"There is where we went in to capture the island, sir; but there is not depth enough on the bar for the brig—Ha! the schooner is putting about again!" suddenly cried Roy, as he beheld the smuggler craft suddenly go about.

"What does it mean?" asked Captain Delorme.

"He sees he cannot escape and will surrender," suggested the old lieutenant before spoken of.

"No, he sees he cannot run to sea through the School of Fish, as those reefs are called, and will either try to hug the main shore, where it is shallow, and run the gantlet by us, or will risk the Devil's Channel to get out."

"There is another channel, then, leading out?"

"Yes, Captain Delorme, but one no one cares to try unless life is at stake, as it deserves its name of Devil's Channel; having wrecked many a fishing craft, for it is a good fishing-ground and we often go there for fish. No, he is going to hug the main shore."

"And we could fetch him to if Mountjoy were not aboard," said Captain Delorme, in a tone of annoyance.

"Would it not be a good idea to give him a hint that you did not care for that?"

"As how, pray?"

"Fire upon him, but so as not to hit him."

"True; Lennox, clear that gun and aim it yourself; fire ahead and astern, but, mind you, don't hit the craft, for Mountjoy and the men must not suffer," ordered Captain Delorme.

The lieutenant hastened to obey, and a moment after the deep boom of the gun burst over the rough waters, and the shot went rushing away in the direction of the flying schooner.

"He still holds on; try him again, Lennox," called out the commander of the Sleuthhound, and again and again the iron messengers of death were sent in close proximity to the smuggler, but, with remarkable precision of aim, Lieutenant Lennox missed the schooner each time, though the shots struck the water and scattered spray upon the men on the decks of the daring craft, a circumstance that caused Captain Darke to remark to his captive:

"Your commander cannot know that you are aboard, sir, or he would not fire upon us."

"He certainly knows it, if the cutter reached the brig," was Albert Mountjoy's reply.

"Curse this wind, it prevented me from running out through the School of Fish Reefs; if it came from yonder quarter I could laugh at the brig, young sir, and," he added, quickly, as another shot from the Sleuthhound struck near, showering the spray upon them, "and, curse that commander of yours, he will blow us out of the water; stand by all to go about!"

His loud order was promptly obeyed, for another shot had again come unpleasantly near, and spinning around, as though on a pivot, the beautiful vessel bounded away on the course she had just come, heading for a distant point of land overgrown with timber.

"Now, sir, your accursed vessel has run me into a scrape; I will have to try the Devil's Channel, and the chances are that it will lead us to Old Satan's dominions," growled Captain Darke, a grim look upon his face.

"I have heard the fishermen on our coast speak of its dangers; will you risk it, or surrender?" asked Mountjoy.

"Ha! ha! ha! Young man, you do not know Darke the Smuggler. I would risk any danger, and I will never surrender; through the Devil's Channel we go, or—"

"Or what?" asked Mountjoy, as the smuggler paused.

"Or to the devil direct," was the reckless response, and he added, in a loud tone:

"Stand by all, for your lives depend upon quick work now, as we run the Devil's Channel."

Away dashed the vessel, the gale increasing, the clouds growing blacker, and the waters rougher, while the sea fell with terrific roar upon the breakers that guarded the outer shores of the island chain.

But, grim and firm at the wheel, stood the smuggler chief, holding the Outlaw, as he called his vessel, on her course to face a terrible danger, and silent and watchful his men stood near to spring at his slightest order.

"By Heaven! see how that brig is handled!" suddenly cried Captain Darke, as the Sleuthhound came dashing through a gateway of reefs, upon which the waves dashed in fury.

"Who is your pilot, sir?" he asked, quickly, after a while, as he saw the brig rushing on in pursuit, following a most dangerous channel.

"A mere boy; the one who led us against your stronghold."

"Ha! his name, please?"

"He is called Roy Dean, but he is a waif without name or country; he was your prisoner, but escaped to-night, and swam a league out to our vessel."

"By old Neptune! I could have sworn it, for that lad is as full of grit as an old wreck is of barnacles."

"Some of my men got a snug sum for kidnapping him, and I tried to make an outlaw of him by threats, hard work, and starvation, but he remained firm, and egad! I intended to let him go, if he would swear not to betray us, for, somehow, I felt I could trust him. So you say he escaped to-night?"

"Yes; swam out with irons on his ankles."

"A desperate chance to take, for he was half starved; but he succeeded, it seems, and I have lost my island, crew and booty through him. Holy Peter! behold how he ran the brig through yonder reef! But he'll never dare follow us into the Devil's Channel," declared Captain Darke, confidently.

For a few moments longer the schooner swept on, under the lee of the island, and then laid over until the rushing waters seethed above her rail, as she careened under the full pressure of the gale, when no longer sheltered by the timber-clad isle.

Changing his course, and with every man standing at his post, and fully realizing his danger, the Outlaw was now heading for the open sea, but between her and the deep-blue waters lay a hundred dangerous reefs, through which wound the Devil's Channel, a fearful gantlet to run even in fair weather, but one terribly so now that the waves were hurled in fury upon the rocks, and darkness rested upon the face of the deep, for the moon was obscured by inky clouds that threatened to burst with the pent-up storm they held.

Nerving himself for the duty before him, Darke, the Smuggler, said to Mountjoy:

"Your life as well as mine depends upon it, so aid me here with the wheel, and be ready to work with the quickness of lightning, for our chances are one in a thousand."

The midshipman threw aside his jacket and silently obeyed, for it was the safety of all that they were to fight for, then.

Into the foaming waters, surrounded by breakers, dashed the schooner, staggering beneath the canvas she carried, and tossed about like a cork in a boiling caldron.

But the smuggler chief had an iron nerve, and was utterly fearless, facing death with an indifference that won the admiration of his crew, and also of Mountjoy and his men.

Sweeping by an ugly reef, and merely getting by, for it was a narrow miss, Darke suddenly cast his eyes astern, and an exultant laugh broke from his lips, while he cried:

"The brig is following. Now, young sir, you will see your vessel go down, for even among

my crew, there is no man who would dare attempt to run through this channel."

"That boy will do it," answered Mountjoy, for a moment lost in admiration of his rival's skill and daring.

"He may be reckless enough to make the attempt, but he cannot succeed; the brig will go down, I say."

"God grant not, for there are noble men on board that vessel; but, to see him die, I could almost wish it so," said Albert Mountjoy, the last sentence in an inaudible voice.

The smuggler chief now had all he could do to keep his eyes upon his own course and vessel, and, alarmed at their own danger, the crew looked ahead, unmindful of what fate might befall the brig; but, after several remarkably narrow escapes from dashing upon the reefs, as the channel turned, all eyes, as if by common consent, glanced astern, and a cry broke from every lip.

"The brig! the brig!"

"By Heaven! that boy still holds on! If she does run this channel we are doomed, for in the heavy seas she can overhaul me," announced Captain Darke, now as anxious regarding the brig's running the gantlet as he had been about his own vessel.

With the speed of a deer the Outlaw bounded on her course, now shying aside, like a thing of sense from a threatening danger to port, and now swinging half round to change her course so as not to rush upon a wall of breakers.

With a curse upon his lips, Darke, the Smuggler, suddenly turned it into a prayer of thanking, as the schooner the next moment forged out of the dangerous chain of reefs, and gained deep water, having safely run the terrible gantlet.

"And thank Heaven for this storm, for it hides us from yonder hound on our track, and will send him down among the rocks," he continued, as the storm-clouds just then burst with fury, shutting out the view of the brig, and rendering the sea as black as the darkest night.

Finding that the schooner could not stand up under the canvas she carried, the chief at once lay to, and reefing everything close, once more got under way, heading down the coast for a point of safety, and guiding his vessel more by instinct than sight, as the darkness was impenetrable even the length of the schooner's deck ahead.

"This is too rough a sea for us to stand long, so I will run into the inlet between the islands, and wait until morning."

"Can you find the channel in this darkness?" asked Albert Mountjoy.

"I think so; but the schooner is straining badly and I must find an anchorage."

"Where the brig will find you in the morning," suggested the midshipman, rather more anxious to keep out in deep water than to run another gantlet like the one they had just passed through.

"The brig is at the bottom before this," was the chief's confident reply.

"I doubt it."

Captain Darke laughed sneeringly.

"That boy pilot might have run through, after what I saw him do, but this black storm destroyed him, mark my words. Hal the storm is sweeping past," and suddenly, through a rent in the black heavens, the moon shone.

"Now we are safe, and I have half a mind to run in and retake my retreat," said the chief, with the reckless determination of a man who loved danger for the excitement it would bring.

A few moments more and the heavy rain-clouds, which had poured down torrents of water, drifted landward before the gale, and once more the moon illumined the sea, now lashed into huge waves.

"Sail ho!"

Every man started; every eye turned to catch sight of the vessel, and every tongue gave utterance to two words:

"The brig!"

"Ay, the brig, by all that's holy!"

It was the chief who spoke, and it was evident that he was deeply moved, for not a quarter of a mile distant was the Sleuthhound, the vessel he had declared at the bottom of the sea, and her course was directly down upon the schooner.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCHOONER'S FATE.

"SCHOONER, ho!"

The ringing cry came from on board the brig-of-war, and the voice was that of Roy Dean, for, as soon as the dark rain-storm had swept over, his keen eye had caught sight of the little vessel, heading down the coast under close-reefed sails.

With a nerve which had astounded all who had watched him, and a skill that was remarkable, he had boldly followed the schooner through the Devil's Channel, his experienced eye telling him where the waters were whitest, and waves dashed highest, was the danger to be avoided, while well he knew that if he kept in the channel there were twenty fathoms beneath the brig's keel.

"In God's name, my lad, what do you find to steer by here?" asked Captain Delorme, standing at the wheel with Roy Dean, aiding him with his strength, and watching with admiration his nerve and skill, while the crew stood at their posts breathless, fearing yet hoping.

"It is easier to run through here in this storm than in a calm, sir, for the waves dash upon the rocks now and show me where danger lies, and I have but to keep the channel," modestly replied the youth.

"It all looks the same to me; but do not let me distract your attention."

"This is too bad."

None uttered a word, but all looked anxiously at Roy Dean, who had spoken.

"That rain-storm is coming upon us, sir, and the rest of the way I will have to run by the sound of the breakers alone, and my remembrance of the channel, for it will be too dark to see. Please place two good men forward to call out to me, sir."

The young pilot spoke with the utmost coolness, and Fred Lennox called out:

"I will take the larboard bow."

"And I the starboard," cried the old lieutenant.

"You can easily distinguish the roar of the breakers from the storm. Call out quickly and distinctly."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the two officers, in the same tone of respect they would have used in addressing their commander, and they hastened forward, just as darkness covered the sea, the same darkness which the smuggler chief had predicted would prove the destruction of the brig.

Into the gloom the Sleuthhound held her way, the torrents of rain falling around her, and every one as silent as death, for the keenest eye could not penetrate half the length of the vessel.

"Breakers ahead!" came in muffled tones from forward, and all were on the *qui vive*, expecting an order from the young pilot.

But, none came, and the brig rushed on in the gloom.

"Breakers off larboard bow!"

The cry came sullenly aft through the roaring waters and beating rain, and the young pilot said simply:

"Starboard hard!"

"Starboard hard 'tis!" answered the deep tones of Captain Delorme, aiding Roy with the wheel.

"Breakers, starboard!" came again from forward, and again the helm was put down and the brig's bows swung away from the threatened danger.

And thus it went on for some minutes, when the bounding of the vessel proved that she was riding the deep sea waves and that the fearful channel had been safely run.

A wild cheer broke from the crew, and Captain Delorme said in a low, tremulous tone:

"Boy, you have won a cadetship by this night's work."

"Let us catch the schooner first, sir," was the modest answer.

"Have you any idea what course to pursue?"

"Yes, sir; he has gone down the coast, I am certain, for he will not care to face this rough sea, and believing the brig lost, will try and run into the inlet between the islands, which is easy to do, if he can get its bearings in the storm."

"Your reasoning is good, and the brig is in your hands; but see, the storm is blowing over," and the captain pointed to where the waters were tinged with moonlight.

Then came the cry that opens this chapter:

"Schooner ho!"

Having sighted the smuggler the brig at once started in pursuit, crowding on sail until she forged through the waves at a terrific speed, and gaining rapidly upon the schooner, which was shaking out the reefs in her canvas, although there was great danger of running under beneath the tremendous pressure.

"He is heading for the inlet, sir, but he cannot escape," cried Roy, gladly, for the full moon now shone in a cloudless sky, and the chase was plainly visible, not half a mile distant.

A yell from the crew answered the words of the young pilot, and every eye was now bent upon the schooner, staggering and bending beneath the clouds of canvas, and threatening each moment to go down bows first beneath the wild waters.

"What does that move mean?" suddenly called out Captain Delorme, as he saw the schooner, which was running wing-and-wing before the wind, jibe her mainsail to leeward, and alter her course.

"It means that he sees that he cannot escape, and is going to beach his vessel, sir."

"You are right, Dean; it is a bold and reckless fellow who commands that craft."

"He is, indeed, sir; hal! there she goes!"

A cry broke from the watching crew as they beheld the beautiful schooner rush bows on, and under her clouds of canvas, upon the sandy arm of the inlet, and come to a sudden stop that sent her tapering masts and all her sails over

into the water with a crash that was distinctly heard on the brig.

"Poor Mountjoy; he is having a hard time of it; but what is to be done, now?" asked Captain Delorme, turning to Roy, as though to a superior.

"Run in and anchor behind the island, sir, for the storm has blown itself out, and then send boats ashore to capture the smugglers," was the advice of the young pilot.

"Is there no way they can leave the island?"

"Only by a small boat, sir, and if we do not make a landing soon, they will escape us, for Captain Darke is no man to remain in a trap, and evidently had some plan of action when he reached his schooner."

"Then run in under the island and we'll anchor. Lennox, get two boats ready to make a landing."

The brig soon ran into comparatively smooth water, the boats were lowered, and, in spite of his past hardships, and severe work of the night, Roy Dean went as guide, having braced himself up with a dose of brandy, given him by the surgeon.

A short row and the party landed; but, without losing time they started across the point to the spot where lay the schooner, arriving there just as the east grew gray with approaching dawn.

The schooner lay upon her beam-ends, the surf hitting her hard blows ever and anon, and a mass of wreck lay upon the beach.

"Ahoy, Sleuthhounds!"

The men started at the hail, and, glancing around, saw several forms approaching them, having been hidden behind a sand hill.

"Hold! We are friends," cried the same voice.

"Mountjoy, as I live!" and Fred Lennox sprang forward and greeted the young midshipman, who just then came up, followed by the three seamen, who had been his fellow-prisoners.

"Well, where have you come from, and where are your captors?" asked Fred Lennox.

"We were forced passengers on yonder wrecked schooner, during the desperate chase you gave us, and Darke, the Smuggler, and his crew shouldered a small boat when we struck, and started off at a lively trot down the island, generously giving us our freedom, and bidding me tell Captain Delorme that he intended to yet meet him under better circumstances, and avenge the damage done him this night."

"And you, Roy, he told me to tell you he will make first officer of his new schooner."

"Thank you, I am no buccaneer, but from this day I will devote myself to the capture of Darke, the Smuggler."

"Can we not catch him now, Dean?" asked Lieutenant Lennox.

"No, for it is but half a mile across to the mainland, and, as he carried a boat with him, he is already nearly there; but his time will yet come, for I have a bitter score to settle with him for the long months he has made me suffer, and those men who had seen Roy Dean that night, in all the dangers through which they had passed, felt convinced that he would keep his word, cost what it might, while Albert Mountjoy turned deadly pale, conscience-stricken at the evil part he had played against the man he feared and hated.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL LETTER.

THE sea having gone down and the wind abated, it soon became practicable for the brig's crew to reach the wrecked schooner without difficulty, and the seamen busied themselves in removing what booty they could from the smuggling craft, while Roy Dean, returning to the Sleuthhound, took her up to the inlet opposite the retreat of the outlaws, and landed a party to go to the aid of Midshipman Wilber, who had not been idle, for the dead had been buried, the wounded cared for, and the stores and traps found in the retreat gathered, ready to be transferred to the vessel-of-war.

Toward evening, having fully broken up the rendezvous, and with quite a number of prisoners, Captain Delorme set sail from the island, more than satisfied with his night's work, for he felt, in the loss of their two vessels, their booty and two-thirds of their band, that the outlaw league had received a blow from which it would be hard to recover.

"And we owe all this to you, my lad, and I will to day write on to Washington asking for a cadetship for you, with orders to report to my vessel, for I do not wish to lose you."

"I will tell fully all that you have done for your country, and that I believe you to be in every way worthy of a position as officer in the navy, for, though a boy in years, you have proven yourself every inch a man. Now, we will cruise down the coast and drop you off at your home, for your friends must be anxious about you; but in a few months I will be again in these waters, and will bring you your warrant as a cadet."

Roy Dean thanked Captain Delorme for his kindness, and two nights after the brig-of-war lay to opposite the small fishing hamlet in which was the home of Daniel Dean, and the

young fisherman was rowed ashore, Albert Mountjoy going in charge of the boat.

Arriving at the beach, two fishermen were there watching the strange vessel, and in one of them Roy recognized Dave Tuttle, a man whom he had never liked, but who, in his joy at returning home, he spoke kindly to.

The man merely nodded his head, though he seemed surprised at the return of the youth, and stepped forward to speak to Albert Mountjoy, who called him one side, telling him he had a message for him to carry home for him.

"I will see your father and Ruby in the morning, Albert, and will tell them all you wish," said Roy.

"Thank you, sir, I prefer to intrust my messages to honest Dave Tuttle here," was the haughty reply of Albert Mountjoy. It caused Roy Dean's face to flush with anger; but he kept down his rising temper and said, simply:

"As you please; good-by, until we meet again."

Mountjoy made no answer, and the young fisherman, bidding the boat's crew farewell, and raising his cap in return for their cheer and kind wishes, he walked away, taking the path that led him to the fishing hamlet, a bevy of some forty cabin homes situated in a fertile valley, for the honest dwellers there were half farmers, half fishermen, and tilled their broad acres as well as toiled in the sea for a subsistence.

The home of old Daniel Dean was the largest and most comfortable in the valley, and an humble mill, with the "Commodore" for the miller, was near by, the wheel turned by a crystal stream, which daily ground out for the old man a fair living.

A whitewashed cottage of four rooms, with a flower-garden upon one side, and orange grove upon the other, was the abode of the father, son and little waif from the sea whom they had adopted, and learned to love as though he had been their own flesh and blood.

The evening was not far spent when Roy came in sight of his house, and the Commodore was seated upon the little piazza, enjoying the cool breeze that swept up the valley from the Gulf, while Hazel having mounted the old mill horse had gone over to Magnolia Retreat to see Ruby, whom he loved with the same warmth he felt for Roy.

"Father, I am home again," and Roy Dean bounded to the side of the old man, who uttered a cry of joy and dragged him down into a seat on the bench near his easy-chair.

"What! you here, boy? I was asleep, or dreaming of you. When did you come, and, oh, Roy, Roy, where have you been?" and the Commodore spoke with a nervous eagerness that showed how deeply he was moved.

"It is a long story, father; I was captured by smugglers, who tried to force me to join their band, and because I would not dishonor myself, they nearly starved me to death."

"But I escaped from them at last, and—"

"They said you had joined the band of Darke the Smuggler, and even become a pirate; but I knew that they lied; yes, in their false throats they lied," said the old man, musingly.

"What! who dared accuse me of becoming a smuggler?" and Roy Dean was upon his feet at once.

"Many did, my boy, but I knew they lied, though Dave Tuttle said he saw you go off in the boat with the smugglers, and Albert Mountjoy saw you, too, so that many believed it."

"Father, as God is my judge, I was kidnapped by three men of Darke's band, and I was their prisoner until four days ago, when I escaped, by swimming out to a brig-of-war anchored off the coast, and, so far from being a member of the band, I was the cause of its destruction, for I led the crew of the Sleuthhound against the island, and only Captain Darke and a dozen of his men escaped, as Albert Mountjoy can vouch for, for he is a midshipman upon the brig-of-war, and not half an hour ago landed me upon the beach."

"My brave, noble boy, I believe you, and, old as I am, I will fight the man who dares say one word against you; and oh, how glad will Hazel be to know all this!"

"And where is Hazel?"

"Gone over to the Retreat to see Ruby; I believe he loves that girl, Roy, more than he should."

Roy Dean started, but made no reply, and in his heart was thrust the first pang of jealousy he had ever known.

And thus for a long while those two sat talking together, the Commodore listening to the strange story of Roy's sufferings and adventures, and telling him again and again that he was born to be a great man.

"I hope so, father, but I shall at least be a good one," the youth replied, modestly, and just then Hazel Dean coming up, a second warm greeting took place, for the handsome young fisherman was devotedly attached to the boy whose life he had saved.

"And they say you are a smuggler, round here, Roy, though we all don't believe it," and Ruby says she'll stake her life on it that you were not, and I've often thought that, if folks really told the truth, I was sorry I had saved

you that awful night of storm; but, God bless you, boy, you are back again now, and we'll nail the lie in the teeth of the first man that dares breathe it against you."

"And there are two men whom you wish to avoid, my son."

"And who are they, father?"

"One is that worthless fellow, Dave Tuttle, and the other is widow Mordaunt's son."

"What! Mark Mordaunt?" asked Roy, in surprise.

"Yes; he has no love for you, and has often asked our people, when passing through the hamlet, about you, always giving it as his opinion that you had turned smuggler."

"Why, I saved his life two years ago! You remember when that bear rushed upon him back in the hills, and I shot him?"

"True; but a man of evil heart does not wish to owe his life to any one."

"I knew he was wild and reckless, and was running through with his poor mother's property, but I did not believe him bad at heart."

"He is not your friend, Roy, that is certain; nor is Dave Tuttle," put in Hazel, and then the conversation dropped for the night; but at an early hour Roy Dean was up and out at the mill, and it cut him to the heart to see that there were really many who believed he had been leagued with the smugglers, and took little stock in his story of captivity.

Presently along came Dave Tuttle, and seeing Roy he called out insultingly:

"Well, how did you leave your captain, Darke, the Smuggler?"

In an instant Roy confronted the bully and sent his fist into his face with a force that knocked him down.

With a cry of rage Dave Tuttle sprung to his feet and rushed upon the youth, to suddenly see the tall form and calm face of Hazel Dean confront him, and felt a gripe of iron upon his throat.

"Fight a man and not a boy, you cowardly cur," said Hazel, in his quiet way, and he hurled the bully from him as though he had been a child.

"Hazel Dean, you and that nameless boy shall regret this day; I swear it!"

"Begone, or I will break every bone in your worthless body," and Hazel's look indicated a firm intention to keep his word. "Dave Tuttle, with muttered curses and threats of revenge, limped away; but those around the mill who knew him felt that Roy Dean had made a dangerous enemy."

And yet the punishment of Dave Tuttle for his insult had a salutary effect upon others, and a more respectful manner was exhibited for the youth, whom so many professed to believe had turned smuggler, while others rallied in his defense.

After dinner Roy Dean determined to run up the coast to Magnolia Retreat, for he could no longer restrain himself from a visit to Ruby; so getting into his little cat-rigged sail-boat he started along the shore, happy in the thought that Ruby believed him true, and would soon welcome him with heartfelt joy.

Dragging his boat up on the beach opposite the plantation, he ascended the path to the cliff above, and soon was mounting the steps leading to the broad piazza.

"Oh, Roy!"

Out through the full length window opening upon the piazza came Ruby Mountjoy, grown from the tiny girl of four rescued from the wrecked clipper ship that fearful night, into a lovely maiden just crossing the threshold of womanhood.

Dressed in pure white, her red-gold hair falling in braids down her back, and her beautiful face flushed with joy, she was indeed exquisitely beautiful, and it was no wonder that not only Roy, but all who saw her loved her.

"Roy, I am so glad you have come," and she clasped the young man's hands in both her own.

"And I am glad to get back, Ruby, and remove the stain from my name which I hear rests upon it."

"What a foolish idea people had, to think for a moment that you could turn outlaw," and Ruby gazed into the handsome, fearless face of the young man with a look of admiration she could not conceal. "But you look pale and haggard," she said, anxiously.

"You will not be surprised, Ruby, when I tell you all that I have gone through; but here comes Captain Mountjoy."

"Yes, he rode to town this morning. Come, papa, here is a surprise for you," she called out, as Captain Mountjoy, grown to be a handsome, gray-haired man of fifty, dismounted from his horse, threw his rein to a negro, and ascended the steps of the piazza, while Roy advanced to meet him, his hand extended.

"No, young man, I cannot take your hand, for there are grave charges made against you," said Captain Mountjoy, sternly.

Roy turned red and then pale, but replied, frankly:

"I know, sir, that there has been an idle rumor, set afloat by an enemy whom I punished this morning, that I had leagued myself with smugglers; but I return, now, to prove that false,

and can show you that not only was I belied, but that I was the cause of the destruction of this very band."

"All this I know, sir, but you are considered to have betrayed your comrades in crime!"

"Captain Mountjoy, I do not understand you," said Roy, with considerable warmth of tone and manner.

"I will make it plain, then; I hold here a letter from my son, Midshipman Mountjoy, on board the brig-of-war Sleuthhound, telling me that you did swim out to the vessel and lead the sailors against the island, causing the breaking up of the band; but the outlaws say that you did so in revenge for an insult cast upon you by Darke, the Smuggler, and that you were a traitor to the league."

"And Albert Mountjoy writes this?"

"He does; he sent me this letter by a fisherman, this morning."

"It is an infamous lie!"

"Be careful, young man," said Captain Mountjoy, with anger.

"Be careful of giving the lie to one who would ruin me? No, I would fling it in the teeth of Albert Mountjoy himself."

"And he would kill you in your tracks, did you do so."

"That would depend, sir, upon circumstances; but I wish no quarrel with you, Captain Mountjoy, but am deeply pained that one whom I respected so highly, would believe me so base."

"I confess, Roy, that it was hard for me to believe; but here is Albert's letter, and he says your good service alone prevented Captain Delorme from holding you prisoner."

"Why, sir, Captain Delorme will write on to Washington to secure me a Naval Cadetship for what I did."

"Have you a line from Captain Delorme to this effect?"

"No, sir; I confess that I have not; I never thought it necessary to get the written proof of another man that I was not a liar."

"I am sorry, Dean; but I must believe my son. For your sake I pity you, and I regret to tell you that from this day you are a stranger at Magnolia Retreat."

"So be it, sir," and Roy's voice trembled as he turned his eyes upon Ruby, who, like a statue, white and anxious, had listened in silence to every word.

Now, as Roy turned toward her, she sprung forward and grasped his hand.

"If you go, Roy, remember I do not believe one word of this charge against you," she said, firmly.

"But, Ruby, I have Albert's letter here," interposed Captain Mountjoy.

"There is some sad mistake, sir. Again, Roy, believe me ever your friend."

He could utter no word, but with downcast head turned away, all the joy and hope of his heart gone out.

Once he hesitated, half-turned as if about to speak, but then went on, and watching him, Captain Mountjoy and Ruby saw him disappear down the cliff path leading to his boat; then the young girl, with a moan on her lips, sunk unconscious upon the floor of the piazza.

CHAPTER IX.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

WITH a heavy heart and pale face, Roy Dean set sail for his return to his home, almost crushed by the severe blow that had been dealt him by the letter from Albert Mountjoy.

"I have always felt that Albert Mountjoy did not like me; but, that he would be so utterly wicked as to write what he did, I could not believe."

"And what am I to do to clear my name?"

"Await the return of the brig, and have Captain Delorme clear me of the accusations; and that will prove how vile Albert is, and it will almost break his father's heart."

"Ah me! mine is a hard lot, for before I am nineteen my sorrows are almost greater than I can bear."

"Bah! am I a coward to yield to adversity? No, I will be brave and face my accusers, for in good time the Sleuthhound will return, and I have comfort in knowing that father Hazel and Ruby do not believe the charges against me. Ah, Ruby; if you were to doubt me indeed would I be wretched."

Cheered by the thought that those he loved most did not believe him guilty, his face brightened, and was almost cheerful when he ran his little boat into the inlet where the fishermen kept their craft of all kinds.

A dozen or more fishermen were gathered upon the shore, listening to the story that one man was telling, of how he had just returned from up the coast, from Pensacola, and in running by night close in toward the island where the smugglers were supposed to have their retreat, he had heard wild singing coming from a point of rocks, and had discovered a white form walking up and down beneath a tall pine tree.

"It is the spot where the dead smugglers were buried," said Roy, deeply interested in the fisherman's story.

"Oh, you is back, is yer, boy? Well, folks do say as how yer oughter know all about them

smugglers' doin's, an' mayhap you can tell us about this woman in white, or spook, whatever she may be," said the old fisherman, attracted to Roy by his remark.

"Yes, I can tell you all about it, Sandy Benson; that is, about the island and the smugglers, but I do not understand about this woman you speak of, for we left the island deserted."

"And who is *we*, boy?"

"The men of the brig-of-war *Sleuthhound* and myself."

"Spin out ther yarn, lad, an' we will lend yer our ear-tackle," called out a fisherman, and in a few words Roy told his adventures.

"Well, it do seem uncommon strange, I can tell yer, that I should ever live ter see a speerit, for I knows now it wasn't human; ther voice was too sweet, an' ther song were too wild, wasn't it, Jake?" and the old man appealed to his comrade who had been with him.

"It were; it seemed like a angil singin', an' I fears we has had our warnin', o'e man," answered Jake, with a shudder at the thought of death.

"It may be my cable's goin' ter be cut, an' I have to up an' sail for a port beyond ther skies, Jake, but I is ready, for I has stood my watch night an' day, an' ther Lord has never caught me sleepin' in storm or calm, when duty called. I guess we'll be piped aloft afore long, but I'll be on deck ter meet ther call o' ther Bo'swain," answered the old man, firmly.

Roy turned sadly away, muttering:

"That old man's life has been as innocent as a child's; but what strange story is this he tells about this woman in white, and her strange singing?"

"I saw no woman on the island, so who can she be but a spirit?" and Roy felt a superstitious dread creeping over even his brave heart, for in those days the

"Men who went down to the sea in ships
And saw the wonders of the deep,"

were the most superstitious of all human beings, and many an honest tar—ay, and officer—believed that spirits from the shadowland visited this world of ours always to bring a fate.

"Well, Roy, did you see Ruby and the captain?" asked the Commodore, as the youth approached.

"Yes, father, and was forbid ever to visit the *Retreat* again."

"What mean you, lad?" asked the old man, adjusting his spectacles and gazing in surprise upon the youth.

"I mean that Captain Mountjoy believes me a smuggler, and told me I was to be as a stranger at his home."

"No, no! and Ruby?"

"Believes me to be innocent."

"The noble girl! But all will yet come right, my boy, when the brig returns with your warrant as a cadet."

"So I believe and hope, father; I will bide my time," and Roy left the mill and walked rapidly away in the direction of the little village or town, several miles distant, to purchase some ammunition for his rifle, as he was devoted to hunting, and kept the table at home always well supplied with game.

Arriving at the village he made his purchases and went to the inn to speak to Ned Hayes, the landlord's son, and with whom he had always been on most friendly terms.

"Roy, Roy! come here, quick!"

The youth turned as he heard his name called in the sweetest of voices.

It was Nellie Hayes, a pretty little brunette of seventeen, who had always admired the young fisherman, to the great disgust of the village youths.

"Why, Nellie, I am glad to see you," and Roy went to the parlor window to speak to her.

"And I to see you back; and I am sorry, too, for you have enemies here who malign you, Roy, and I just called you to prevent your going into the bar, for Mark Mordaunt and his wild crowd are there."

"Thank you, Nellie; but I do not care for them; I am in search of your brother Ned."

"He is off hunting; but, Roy, Mark and his friends are discussing you and saying such shameful things against you."

"Then I will enter the room," and the youth turned into the broad hall and the next moment stood in the presence of his traducers.

There were half a dozen men present, several the sons of respectable people in the town, and the others young planters living in the vicinity.

Behind the bar stood Judge Hayes, a blunt, good-natured man, who was defending Roy as he entered, and whose sudden appearance created a stir.

Nodding to the crowd, all of whom he knew, Roy approached the bar and held out his hand to the friendly greeting of Judge Hayes.

"Glad to see you back, my boy, and proud of your good work, for some of the fisher lads have been over and told us all about it."

"And do you believe the cock-and-bull story of this pirate, Judge?"

Roy turned quickly toward the speaker, an elegantly-dressed young man of twenty-four,

with a handsome but reckless and dissipated face.

"Mark Mordaunt, did you apply the epithet of pirate to me?" and Roy Dean was white, but calm, as he stepped forward and confronted the man who had insulted him.

"Does it offend your majesty to be called by the name your deeds have won?" was the sneering reply.

But hardly had the answer left the lips of Mark Mordaunt when he received a stinging blow in the face that caused him to measure his length upon the floor.

Momentarily he was stunned, and a friend of the fallen man said, threateningly:

"You have sealed your death sentence now, my gallant fisherman."

"I am responsible for my acts, sir," was the quiet answer, while, too brave to walk away, Roy stood awaiting the action of Mark Mordaunt, whom his friends aided to his feet.

Wiping the blood from his face and glaring at Roy, he suddenly drew a dirk from his bosom and rushed upon him, to suddenly start back, as he confronted a pistol muzzle, while the crowd scattered right and left.

"For shame, cowards that you are, to attack one whose noble nature you cannot understand."

It was Nellie Hayes who spoke, and in her tiny hand she held a large dragoon pistol that belonged to her father, and which she had seized to come to the rescue of Roy.

"Oh, Nellie, do not mix up in this affair, for I do not fear them," cried Roy, touched by the act and words of the noble girl.

"I have mixed in, and I will prevent these bullies from harming an unarmed man," was the plucky reply, and there was not one of the party, from Mark Mordaunt down, who did not wish himself well out of the scrape, for Nellie Hayes was the belle of the village, and all of the young men were in love with her.

"Gentlemen, I agree with my daughter, ha! ha! ha!" and old Judge Hayes laughed heartily for awhile, as if the scene was most ludicrous, and then he resumed:

"Nellie, you have carried the war into the enemy's camp, and, bless my soul, you have demoralized them with an old pistol that has not been loaded since the Revolution over thirty years ago, ha! ha! ha!"

Nellie broke into a ringing laugh also, and even Roy smiled, while Mark Mordaunt and his friends scowled, turned red in the face, and with threatening looks at the youth, walked out of the room.

"Well, well, this is as good as a play, and I've laughed until I have cried. Go and put your grandfather's pistol back, Nell; and, Roy, go back with me in my chaise, for I am going over to the hamlet after some fish; I'll order the horse," and still laughing the jolly old judge left the room, while Roy turned to the brilliant little beauty, and offering his hand, said feelingly:

"I fear you have made enemies, Nellie, in taking up my cause; but I thank you for preventing an unpleasant difficulty, for I frankly tell you that I am armed, and would have defended myself against Mark Mordaunt and his party."

"I felt that, Roy; but little care I for any enemies I may make; but you are in danger here, for there are many who believe you to have been in league with Darke's band, and now they say you betrayed them, so, please do not expose yourself; in fact, go off on a fishing cruise with Hazel until the affair blows over."

"I am innocent, Nellie, of every charge against me, and I will face any man who dares accuse me of crime," was the quick reply.

"Ah, me! how is all this to end, I wonder? But, Roy, believe me when I say I will trust you, come what may."

"I thank you, Nellie; now, good-by, for I see your father is ready."

But, just as Judge Hayes was about to start, a man rode up to see him upon important business that would detain him for some time, and he called out to his daughter:

"Come, Nellie, get in and drive this ferocious young pirate home."

Nellie would gladly have consented, but Roy decidedly refused, offering as an excuse that Mark Mordaunt and his party would say he asked her to go with him for protection.

"Then, beware of them, for they went down the road to the shore ten minutes ago," warned Nellie.

"I will neither avoid nor seek them. Good-by!" and, taking up his parcels, Roy Dean trudged away on his return to the coast, an object of curiosity to all whom he met, for rumor was flying rapidly through the neighborhood, and already he was looked upon by many as a young pirate.

Walking briskly along he had traversed half the distance to his home, when, out from a thicket upon either side of the road, appeared half a dozen horsemen, who halted immediately in front of him.

It was Mark Mordaunt and his friends, and the former said, in a revengeful tone:

"Tarry a while, Sir Pirate, for you and I have a score to settle."

CHAPTER X.

THE DUELLO.

"WELL, what would you with me?" and Roy Dean, pale yet calm and fearless, confronted his enemies, for such he now felt them to be from Mark Mordaunt down.

"That you shall soon know, sir; are you armed?" insolently said Mark Mordaunt.

"I am fully prepared to protect myself against highwaymen," was the cool retort.

Mark Mordaunt saw at once that he could not bully this resolute youth whom he felt assured was armed and that a movement on their part to seize him would be at their peril; so the young planter said:

"I met you here, sir, to say that you must meet me in the *duello*, for I am not one to let even a low fisherman go unpunished for a blow."

"As you please, Mark Mordaunt; you insulted me and I punished you for it, and am ready to give you satisfaction at any time you may desire after to-day."

"No; you would run away and rejoin your smuggler friends did I allow you to escape now. This is the time and place that I have selected."

"And you are surrounded by your friends, while I have no one here to see that I get fair play."

"Wilber Otey here will act as your second to oblige me," and Mark Mordaunt referred to a young planter, well known for his dissolute life and unenviable character.

"I would prefer to act alone than to accept the services of a dishonorable man," was the cutting and fearless reply.

"What! do you apply such words to me?" and Wilber Otey sprung toward Roy Dean, an angry light in his eyes.

"It is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that you have been called a villain, Wilber Otey."

Maddened by the cool and stinging words, the young planter would have rushed upon him had he not been restrained by Mark Mordaunt, who said, significantly:

"Bide your time, Otey; my quarrel is on the *tapis* now, and after I have settled with this young smuggler you can call him to account for the insult to you."

Then, turning again to Roy, he continued:

"Well, are you ready to meet me now?"

"No; for I see your game is to kill me, if in your power, and did I slay you I would have to fight all of you, I have no doubt, or worse still, you would swear against me and have me tried for murder. I am not a fool, Mark Mordaunt, to be caught in a trap laid by you and your friends."

"Then I say you *shall* fight me and *here* and *now*," and Mark Mordaunt assumed a more threatening attitude.

"And I say that I go from here, and the one who stands in my way shall die."

The eyes of Roy Dean fairly blazed as he spoke, and from his breast-pocket he suddenly drew a small double-barreled pistol.

But, there was a general movement among his enemies, and half a dozen pistols covered the youth immediately, while Mark Mordaunt said, sneeringly:

"You see you cannot escape, Sir Pirate."

Roy Dean felt that he was wholly in the power of bitter enemies, for, should he shoot down two of them, his own fate would be instantly sealed.

Utterly friendless, at bay and his life threatened by men who would not hesitate to take it, he knew not what to do, but in the trying ordeal his nerve did not forsake him, and he gazed defiantly at the crowd that held him under the muzzles of their pistols.

"Cowards! if you have any manhood in you, follow me to the shore, and with Hazel Dean as my second, I will singly meet every one of you."

"No, you must do so now," was the determined answer of Wilber Otey.

"Gentlemen, that boy has too much pluck for me to see him imposed upon, and I'll be cursed if he shall be."

All started at the unexpected words, coming from the lips of one of their number, Raleigh Reid, the son of the village pastor, and a young man who had won a name as a reckless gambler and evil genius generally, but who was known to possess some good qualities and a generous nature.

"Well, Reid, what are we to understand by this?" asked Mark Mordaunt, angrily.

"Just what I say; I will protect this brave fisher-lad, for you insulted him first, and he rightly knocked you down for it; but, as you said you wished to call him out, I joined you, and if he meets you, he shall have fair play; but if any of the rest of you attack him, then I make his quarrel mine."

All present knew Raleigh Reid well, and that he was, in spite of his almost effeminate face and slender, graceful form, a very giant in strength, while his courage none cared to doubt, and they were not anxious to feel the clutch of his delicate fingers, that skillfully touched the strings of a guitar, or unerringly

grasped the butt of a dueling pistol, for one year before he had killed his best friend in a duel, on account of a sudden rivalry that sprung up between them for the love of pretty Mary Mordaunt.

Poor Mary, half broken-hearted at the act of Raleigh Reid on her account, refused to see him again, and losing the one he idolized, and mourning the death of his friend at his hands, Reid had turned to the wine-cup and gambling-table to drown sorrow, though, well knowing that his evil career was turning the dark hair of his parents to silver, and bringing misery and shame upon their declining years.

Such was the young man who now holdly sided with Roy Dean, and not one was there in that crowd who cared to push matters to a crisis with Raleigh Reid.

"Then, with you as his champion, the smuggler cannot refuse to meet me," persisted Mark Mordaunt.

"If Roy Dean, whom I believe to be more sinned against than sinning, will accept of my services as his second, he shall have them, and if he kills you, Mark, in fair combat, I pledge him my word he shall not be molested."

"Indeed I thank you, Raleigh Reid, and if Mark Mordaunt still forces this meeting, I am wholly at his service," and Roy stepped forward and grasped the hand of his new-found friend, who, in turn, seemed fully determined to stand by his words.

"I do force this meeting, sir, for I am not one to let a blow pass without punishment."

"So be it, sir; I am in the hands of Mr. Reid for an arrangement of the matter," said Roy, with utmost indifference of tone and manner, and he turned to Raleigh Reid, who stepped apart with him, where they could converse in words that it was not possible for the others to hear, for that the young man who had boldly sided with the fisher-lad, expected treachery at the hands of his friends, was evident.

"Mark, we will use your pistols, but I must load the one to be fired by Roy Dean," said Raleigh Reid, after awhile.

"Why not let the beggarly fisherman use his own pistol, which he drew awhile since?"

"Because it has been loaded some time and might miss fire; if I load the weapons they will certainly go off."

This arrangement did not seem to please either Mark Mordaunt or his friends; but, confident that Raleigh Reid would have his way in the end, and fully confident in his skill as a marksman, Mark Mordaunt was compelled to acquiesce, and the pistols, long, silver-mounted weapons, heirlooms in the Mordaunt family, were taken out and loaded by the seconds, Wilbur Otey acting for the young planter.

Fifteen paces were then carefully stepped off, a Mexican peso tossed up for position and word, both of which Raleigh Reid won for Roy, and the two young men placed in readiness for the duel.

As for Roy Dean, he seemed calm to indifference, while Mark Mordaunt had a revengeful, determined expression upon his face.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" and as the clear, ringing tones of Raleigh Reid cut the air, tones that had floated in harmony through his father's church, when he led the choir before he had gone so wholly to the bad, his face turned deadly pale, for they recalled with painful vividness the scene in his own life one year before, when he had sent a bullet through the heart of a friend, and by that act severed him from the one being he loved most in the world.

"Ready!" was the firm response from both.

"Fire!"

The pistol of Mark Mordaunt flashed at the word, and Roy Dean took a step backward, as though hard hit; but, recovering himself quickly, the youth leveled his pistol and fired.

The bullet went unerringly upon its errand, but not at the life of Mark Mordaunt.

As though disdaining to take a life he held at his mercy, Roy Dean had fired at a mocking-bird, trilling its notes on a branch twenty paces away, and undisturbed by the shot and scene.

Instantly the bird fell dead from off its perch, while Roy Dean said, quietly:

"Your bullet was well sent, Mark Mordaunt; but for the sake of your mother and sister I spare your life."

"Bravo! you've got a noble heart, Roy Dean, beneath that red jacket," and Raleigh Reid sprung forward and grasped his hand, while Mark Mordaunt, white, trembling and furious, knew not what to say or do, for such magnanimity had not been believed possible.

"You cannot accept your life at his hands," said Wilbur Otey to Mark Mordaunt.

"No, we must have a second meeting; demand it," and the young planter advanced toward the spot where Roy and Raleigh Reid stood.

"And I, as second, refuse to allow it, for your bullet would have killed Roy Dean had it not irbedded itself in a gold miniature he wears," said Raleigh Reid.

"A fisher's brat, with a gold miniature," sneered Wilbur Otey.

"If you insult this gentleman again, Wilbur Otey, you quarrel with me," broke in Raleigh Reid, and he bent his burning eyes full upon

the young man with a look he did not care to meet.

"I am glad to know my aim was true. Next time I'll fire at his head," said Mark Mordaunt.

"And I say there shall be no second meeting, for he received your fire, and then gave you your life, which he proved by bringing down yonder bird; that he could have killed you, you know. Come, Dean, if you are going toward the shore, I will accompany you, for my horse will follow."

"And am I to understand, Raleigh Reid, that you forsake your friends for that lad?"

"Oh, no, Mark; I only wish to see fair play done one who has a nerve of iron and the heart of a woman. I'll join you to-night at Hayes's Inn, and we'll drink to sweet Nellie and her Revolutionary pistol that scattered us so today! I am ready, Dean," and calling to his well-trained horse to follow, he walked away with Roy Dean, leaving Mark Mordaunt and his comrades not at all satisfied with the turn of the tide against them.

CHAPTER XI.

RUBY'S PLEDGE.

SEVERAL days passed after the duel, and Roy Dean found himself an object of still more disagreeable notoriety, for the affair had become known, how Nellie Hayes had taken his part at the tavern, and of his meeting with Mark Mordaunt and sparing his life.

Worried by the rumors going abroad, and the insolent gaze of the people he met, Roy kept close at home in the cabin or out upon the Gulf in his little sloop, waiting impatiently for the day to come that would bring the Sleuthhound back and with it his cadetship.

Anxious to learn how Ruby Mountjoy regarded him, after all she had heard against him, he determined one afternoon to walk down in the direction of Magnolia Retreat, and endeavor to see her, for he knew that she passed several hours of each day upon the back of her favorite mare, Bonnie Bess, scouring the country or dashing along the beach.

After a rapid walk the white walls of the mansion came in sight, and he paused, for nowhere was visible the one he so longed to see.

Pausing, he searched the road, and then the grove of magnolias, but without the result he desired, and, greatly disappointed, he turned to retrace his way, though determined to come each day until he did meet the maiden.

"How savagely the tide runs in this afternoon! There has been a storm at sea," he said, and he gazed out upon the blue waters with that wistful gaze of a sailor longing to be bounding over the waves with a fleet craft beneath his feet.

"Great God!"

The cry burst from his lips as though forced from them by sudden fright, and he stood like a statue, gazing with staring eyes over the edge of the cliff.

The sea was rolling in in heavy waves, the tide rising rapidly higher and higher and falling against the cliff with a roar like thunder, and as if striving to crush the opposition of the earth to the power of the ocean.

But this was not what had attracted the gaze of Roy Dean and brought the startled exclamation to his lips; but, instead it was to behold one whom he loved in deadly danger—a young girl struggling for the life of herself and the noble animal that bore her.

That the chances were terribly against him the youth well knew; but he was not one to shrink from danger, and being an untiring swimmer, he quickly threw aside his jacket, hat and shoes and bounded from the cliff into the wild waters.

How nobly he succeeded the reader has already seen, and that he staggered up the path from the sea, carrying his precious burden, and happy beyond expression that he had saved Ruby Mountjoy from a watery grave.

Upon the cliff he was met by Captain Mountjoy and half a hundred slaves, the latter having seen, while at work in the fields, the maid ride down upon the beach and not return, a circumstance that caused them to give the alarm at the mansion, for to their ears came the sound of the incoming tide.

With a manliness that Roy had not expected, after his treatment of him some time before, Captain Mountjoy grasped the hand of the youth, and thanked him over and over again, for Ruby was as dear to him as though she had been his own daughter.

Declining the invitation to the mansion, and refusing also to be driven home in the Magnolia Retreat carriage, Roy Dean returned slowly to the fishing hamlet, his heart glad that to him Ruby owed her life, and more than ever going out to her with love.

When, at the cabin, he told the Commodore and Daniel of his adventure, the former said, fervently:

"God bless you, boy! You will yet make your mark in the world, in spite of the enemies that now beset you."

And Hazel grasped his hand, and in a voice that trembled, said:

"Roy, you have more than saved my life in

saving Ruby. Were she to die, I would not care to live," and he turned away with a manner so strange, and so deeply moved that a new light seemed to break in upon the mind of Roy Dean.

"Can Hazel love Ruby, I wonder?" he muttered, and the thought seemed to give him great pain, as he sat over in a corner of the room, and through the open door saw Hazel making his toilet with great care and putting on his best suit of clothes.

"Hullo, Hazel, it is not the Sabbath day, boy," hailed the Commodore, as his son came out of the room looking certainly very handsome in his new suit.

"I know it, father, but I was going to mount the old horse and ride over to congratulate Ruby," and the man blushed like a school-girl.

"Ah, yes; and give her my love, boy," and the Commodore walked out to have a look about the place, not noticing, as Roy had, the flushed face of his son.

The old nag that Hazel surprised by turning into a saddle-horse that afternoon had not, in a dozen years, passed over the ground at so rapid a pace as he was forced upon while en route to Magnolia Retreat.

But, as he drew near the mansion he came down to a walk, not being urged by his rider, whose courage seemed to be failing him when in sight of the house where lived the girl he so loved.

"She's but a child, and I should be ashamed of myself; but then, there are those who say she cares for me, and she's only a child in years, and I will ask her, for if I do not Albert Mountjoy will return from sea, and the captain intends that she shall be his wife."

"Ah me! if she refuses me, then will I indeed be wretched."

Thus muttering to himself, Hazel Dean gave his rein to a negro boy, who had approached as he rode up, and asking if Ruby was at home learned that she had gone down upon the cliff to a pine grove, a favorite resort of the maiden's.

Thither Hazel at once directed his steps, and soon came in sight of the little lattice arbor glimmering through the trees.

Within sat Ruby, attired in pure white, and looking more beautiful than ever, in spite of the fright and danger of a few hours before.

She held in her lap a book, but had evidently not been reading it, for her eyes were fixed upon the far-off waters, sparkling under the rays of the setting sun.

"Ruby!"

With a slight cry she sprung to her feet, and beholding who it was that had called her, she sprung toward him with a look of pleasure at his coming that set every vein in Hazel's body on fire.

"Oh, Hazel, how glad I am to see you. I know you have come to tell me how happy you are to know that Roy saved me from death."

Hazel could not exactly say that, for he had wished a hundred times, during his ride over, that he had been the one to rescue the young girl; but he was more than rejoiced that she had met with no harm, and told her so with a voice that plainly showed how deeply he was moved at the thought of losing her.

"Oh, Ruby, if you had died it would have broken my heart," he blurted out, after a moment's silence.

"Why, Hazel, the death of a girl like me break the heart of a great strong man like you?" she replied, unintentionally giving him a chance to improve the opportunity for love-making.

"You are no child, or girl any longer, Ruby, but a woman who controls the destinies of men, for there are scores who love you; but, they do not, cannot love you as I do, for, since the night I brought you in my arms from the wreck, you have been dearer to me than all else in the world."

Ruby seemed startled by such words from the honest, calm Hazel Dean, and her face paled a little, while she said softly:

"You love Roy as much as you do me, Hazel."

"Ah, Ruby! why misunderstand me? Roy is a boy, and you a woman. Yes, I love him as a brother, and as I believe I would a son, but you are different, and I have come to ask you to—to—to—well, I might as well out with it—to be my wife."

Ruby was now upon her feet, and her face very pale, while she said, faintly:

"Oh, Hazel, you cannot mean this?"

"I do mean it, Ruby, so help me God!"

"Your wife? Oh, Hazel!"

"I felt I would surprise you, Ruby, for I am no longer a young man, as I am past thirty-five, and I am no scholar, or great gentleman like others you know; but I have an honest heart, and strong hands to toil for you, and I will fit up the little home and make it so comfortable for you, and we will be so happy there, and—"

"Oh, Hazel! Hazel! do not say more," and the maiden buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"My poor Ruby, forgive me! I was a fool

to think that an angel, as you are, could marry a huge, rough bear such as I am. You like old Hazel, but you do not love him, and, as a punishment for having pained you, he will go away from home, and in far-away seas strive to forget that he was so rude as to offer his love."

There was something so pitiable in the words and manner of the strong man, that Ruby looked up, and the expression upon his face touched her as she never had been before, and she had no heart to give him deeper pain, so said, softly:

"And do you love me so much, Hazel?"

"More than you can ever know, Ruby; I would die to give you joy."

She knew that he meant it, and forcing back every hope of the future, that had mingled in her girlish dreams, putting the past behind her, and drawing no sunshine from what might come, she laid her hand upon the arm of the man before her and said, firmly:

"Hazel, you have asked me to become your wife, and, after one year from to-day I will do so, if you so wish it."

He failed to see that some hidden motive prompted her determination; he only saw that she stood before him, and heard her words, and he said, eagerly:

"Do you mean it, Ruby?"

"I do, Hazel Dean; so help me Heaven!"

"God bless you!" and he pressed a kiss upon her forehead, gently and reverently, as though dreading to touch her, and turning away left her with a great joy at his heart.

But Ruby! What were the emotions that flooded her heart and brain?

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE AND DUTY.

"No, no, not there, now; that was where I dwelt in dreamland, and I cannot go there more; let me seek some other spot," and Ruby Mountjoy, who had suddenly checked her steps, when in sight of the little arbor in the grove on the cliff, wheeled to the right about, and mechanically walked in the direction of a clump of trees half a mile away.

It was the day after her pledge to Hazel Dean, and the dark lines about her eyes, and her pale face did not betoken great joy at her promise to become a wife after one year had passed.

As if in sympathy with sad thoughts, she had discarded her snowy dress of the day before for one of a strangely somber hue for a young girl, and the book of poems she had held in her lap, when joined by Hazel Dean, had given place to a novel, as if her brain needed some exciting food, now that the poetry of life had vanished.

"Yes, this shall be my retreat, now, though in the past I have dreaded coming here alone."

Nor was it a wonder, for, sheltered by overhanging trees, an old church stood near, its roof swept by the funeral mists that hung from the limbs of the oaks, and a few paces away glided sluggishly along, to mingle its crystal waters with the blue gulf, was a stream, upon the mossy banks of which stood weeping willows, their drooping branches mirrored in the depths beneath.

And around her slumbered the dead of generations past, some of the tombs being moss-grown and time-worn.

In the front of the burying-ground ran the highway, and beyond was the Gulf, dotted here and there with fishing smacks, while in the rear of the church stretched away hundreds of acres belonging to Magnolia Retreat, the mansion of which, surrounded by flower-gardens and ornamental shrubbery, was distant half a mile down the broad carriage-road.

Upon the left was a heavy magnolia forest, out of the depths of which came the dismal hoot of the owl, and further on, following the curving shores, were other plantation homes.

"Yes, here is my retreat, now," and Ruby threw herself down upon a rustic seat, upon the stream's bank, and idly opened her book, though her eyes were not upon its pages, but roaming over forest, field and water.

For a long time she sat thus, until the sun neared its western home, and then she suddenly sprang to her feet, a stifled cry upon her lips, for a tall form unexpectedly appeared before her.

"I beg pardon, Miss Ruby, for I fear I startled you; I was riding over to the Retreat, and discovering you here, joined you, that I might congratulate you upon your escape yesterday."

It was Mark Mordaunt, and he was elegantly dressed and looking his best; but Ruby had never liked him, and since his duel with Roy Dean, had thought less of him than before.

Still, she could but treat him kindly, as his sister Mary and his mother she really loved, and they often visited at Magnolia Retreat.

"You did startle me, Mr. Mordaunt, for I was lost in deep thought; but, I thank you for your kindness. How are your mother and sister?"

"Well, thank you; they will call in person to present their congratulations; but, is not this a lonely place to seek?" and Mark Mordaunt glanced around at the deepening shadows.

"Yes, but I like loneliness."

"A decided hint to me, I fear," and he spoke with a forced laugh.

"Oh, no; but, will you not go with me to the mansion, for papa will be glad to see you?"

"And you are not, your remark implies; but I will not seek cause of quarrel with you, Ruby, for I sought you for a purpose this afternoon."

"Indeed! may I ask that purpose?"

"I came to tell it you, be your answer what it may; yes, I came to tell you that I love you, and ask you to become my wife."

"I feel honored, Mr. Mordaunt, but I have heard that your preference was for that sweet little village belle, Nellie Hayes."

"A mere flirtation, I assure you, for I could not think of asking Nellie Hayes to take the name of Mordaunt, though I must admit that my attentions to her have perhaps been sufficient to arouse your jealousy."

"My jealousy! Why, you are dreaming, Mr. Mordaunt. I never knew the feeling in my life, and to suffer thus would have to love a man most dearly."

"Then you do not love me?" he asked, seemingly surprised.

"By no manner of means; how could you be so silly as to suspect such a state of unhappiness upon my part?"

"Curse that Raleigh Reid! he has made a fool of me," said Mark Mordaunt, *sotto voce*, and he added aloud:

"I had hoped that my devotion to you had won your regard, and Raleigh Reid told me, only this morning, that he felt confident that you loved me."

"I have heard of Raleigh Reid's jokes before; but I am surprised that he should have selected you as a target and myself as a shaft," and Ruby laughed in such a musical, ringing manner, that a mocking-bird in the cedar shrubbery caught up the sound and echoed it.

"If you consider that he has insulted you, Miss Ruby, I will call him out," said Mark Mordaunt, with an air of bravado.

"Oh, no, he has not insulted me, Mr. Mordaunt, though I should prefer my name not to be bandied about in jest. You are the one he has made a fool of, but, as I have heard of Raleigh Reid's reckless courage and unerring aim, I should advise you to let the joke end here."

"Do you think for a moment that I fear to meet him in an affair of honor?" asked Mark Mordaunt, in a blustering tone.

"I cannot understand, sir, why one man should ever fear another; but we will drop the matter, please," and there was something in the tone and manner of Ruby, that caused Mark Mordaunt to feel that he had better not excite her keen wit against him, and he said in a low tone:

"I am sorry that my hopes led me to believe that you cared for me; please forget all that I have said to you, and let us at least remain friends."

He held out his hand, which Ruby feigned not to see, and raising his light sombrero, he turned and walked to where he had tied his horse.

Mounting, he rode away, muttering to himself:

"I have missed gaining your fortune, my proud beauty, but I will yet have revenge for your disdainful refusal of my heart and hand—a revenge that will yet turn your witty sarcasm into pleadings."

Hardly had Mark Mordaunt ridden away, when another personage appeared upon the scene, coming down the creek bank and carrying a rifle upon his shoulder, while a dog trotted at his heels.

Placing his hand upon the railing, he sprang nimbly over the churchyard fence, and then started suddenly as he beheld the form of Ruby Mountjoy.

"Ruby!"

"Roy!"

The next moment their hands were clasped in friendly greeting.

"I am glad that you have come, Roy, for I have something to tell you," she said, softly.

"And I have something to tell you, Ruby; I am going away."

"Going away?" and she fixed her beautiful eyes upon him in surprise.

"Yes."

Laying his rifle upon a tomb near by, he turned and led her to the rustic seat, and, together, they sat down.

"Yes, Ruby," he began, in a low, earnest tone, "I am going away; but I hope to one day return in honor."

"But, why do you go, Roy?"

"You know how my name is stained here, and though some believe me innocent, there are others who say they know me to be guilty, and insults are daily heaped upon me."

"But, I believe you to be true, Roy."

"I thank you for those words, Ruby, and I will yet prove to you that the letter of Albert Mountjoy was a base fabrication to injure me, for Captain Delorme's vessel I shall find, and he will defend my good name from the dishonor cast upon it."

"Oh, how could Albert be so base?"

"His motives I will not attempt to analyze;

but, I leave home for two purposes, which I shall accomplish," and he spoke with a determination of manner that proved he would not allow himself to think of failure. "One of these purposes is to clear my character of the aspersions cast upon it, and the other to hunt down Darke, the Smuggler, whom rumor now says is fitting out a pirate vessel to cruise in these waters."

"For long months he held me prisoner, starving the life out of me, and treating me most inhumanly, and I will yet be revenged by bringing him to the yard-arm. For these reasons I leave home, where there is no tie to bind me, now, other than my love for father and Hazel."

She looked quickly up, and their eyes met, and in Ruby's there was such a look of reproach that Roy said, quickly:

"Forgive me, Ruby; but I did not speak of you, as you were the cause of my going away."

"Me! Why, Roy?"

"Yes, for I go to prove that my honor is untainted, and win a name that I may one day ask you to wear."

He stood before her, now, and in his hunting-suit, that set off his fine form to perfection, and with his handsome face and earnest eyes gazing into her own, he looked every inch a man, and one who, though a boy in years, might win the heart of any young girl.

"Oh, Roy!"

It was all she could say, while her face became deadly pale, and her form trembled violently.

"Ruby! Ruby! what is the matter?" he cried, in dire alarm.

"Roy, it is best for you to go, and—and—"

"I am listening, Ruby."

She kept on in a constrained voice, that had suddenly lost the music of its tone:

"And never return."

"Good God! Ruby, can you mean this?"

"Yes, Roy."

"And never return?"

"Not until you and I have grown wiser, Roy."

"Why, may I ask?" and his voice was forced to speak calmly.

"Because I love you, Roy," and crying out the words with reckless abandon, she threw herself into his arms, and sobbed like a child.

"Ruby, my poor Ruby, what can you mean?" he said, after a while.

"I mean, Roy Dean, that I love you more than all else on earth, that you are my girlhood's idol, and, yet, thus loving you, I can never be your wife."

"Are you mad, Ruby?"

"No; perhaps if I were mad the pain would be less keen, and I wish to God I had sunk forever beneath yonder blue waters, yesterday, ay, never been brought from the wreck, that night of storm, years ago, for I love you, Roy Dean, and am the promised wife of Hazel Dean."

She sprang away from him now, while he looked at her as though horrified; but at last he said, feelingly:

"And is that fair to Hazel, Ruby?"

"Yes, for he does not know, and will not know that I do not love him as he could wish. He saved me from that wreck at the risk of his life, and now I know that he has loved me from then until now."

"He saved you, too, Roy, and it is your duty, as it is mine, to make a great sacrifice to give him joy."

"Loving as he does, and as his noble nature is capable of, it is his whole being, and my own heart shall break before I make his life wretched."

"I have promised to become his wife and yet I tell you that I love you more than all else in the world. I have promised to be his wife, though it will drive me from yonder home of luxury to an humble fisherman's cabin; and, thus loving you, and thus promising him, I say to you it is best that you go from me and—never return—at least," she added, with an effort, "until after I am his wife."

"I will obey you, Ruby, for I too feel that I should sacrifice my happiness to bring joy to the heart of noble Hazel. Farewell!"

He held out his hand, but she sprang again into his arms, kissing him passionately.

Then, suddenly releasing herself, she turned and glided away, leaving him standing in the churchyard, with the shadows of night gathering around him, and making the lonely scene as dismal as was his aching heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ACCUSATION.

"HAZEL, I am alarmed about Roy, for he never remains absent this late, unless at sea."

"I'm worried about the boy myself, sir, and will look him up, if he does not come soon," answered Hazel Dean, addressing the Commodore, for the two were seated upon the porch of their little house.

It was verging on toward midnight, and Roy had gone out early in the day with his dog and gun; not returning, the father and son were naturally anxious regarding his safety, for

they well knew the enemies he had, since it was rumored that the youth had joined the smugglers.

After waiting awhile longer, and glancing down the vale and out upon the moonlit waters of the Gulf, Hazel was rising to go forth to search for Roy, when the object of their anxiety appeared.

"Well, my boy, I am glad you have returned; but I thought that you had gone out hunting," said the Commodore, kindly.

"I did, father," was the quiet answer, and in a tone that proved that Roy was deeply moved.

"Then where is your rifle?"

"True, I have forgotten it. The truth is, father, as I was coming the road by the Magnolia Retreat burying-ground, I met Mark Mordaunt, who was returning from town, and evidently under the influence of liquor.

"Recognizing me in the moonlight, he turned his horse and spurred toward me, at the same time drawing a pistol, and saying he intended killing me.

"I did not care to slay him, so brought his horse down with a shot, determined to then spring upon Mordaunt and give him a good thrashing; but the fall of his horse threw him heavily to the ground, and he lay there stunned."

"Not dead?" asked the Commodore, anxiously.

"Oh no, for I filled my hunting flask with water and soon brought him to, when he at once commenced a tirade against me, to avoid which I left him, and looking back saw him arise and start homeward; but in the trouble, I left without my rifle."

"I will return and get it for you, as you seem tired, Roy," said Hazel, kindly.

"Oh no; I will get Sandy Benson's boy to go after it early in the morning, for I leave home within the hour."

"Leave home?"

It was the question on the lips of both Daniel and Hazel Dean.

"Yes, father and Hazel, for I will not longer remain here, stigmatized as I am daily with the brand of smuggler; no, I will put to sea in the little sloop you gave me, father, and find the brig-of-war Sleuthhound, and if my cadetship has not been received, I will enlist as a seaman."

It was in vain that both the Commodore and Hazel urged against such a course, for Roy was decided, and finding all arguments unavailing, they set about preparing for his trip.

"I will go with you and put you on the Sleuthhound, Roy," announced Hazel.

"No, indeed; the sloop I can easily manage, and it may be weeks before I run across the brig. I shall run along the coast of course, putting in to Mobile and Pensacola; besides, I intend to visit the smugglers' island and discover the mystery of this specter that the lads all say they see there at night on the rocks, and also hear singing."

"Don't be foolhardy, boy, for there are spooks you'd better let alone," warned the Commodore, with the superstitious dread of a sailor of that age.

"I fear neither spook, spirit nor human being," and Roy uttered a reckless laugh, and, having provisioned the trim little sloop, which he had picked up at sea a year before, and which Hazel had rigged for him, he went down to the shore, followed by the two men.

"Good-by, my boy; what it is that drives you away from your home to leave your father and brother, I do not know; but, God be with you, cruise where you may."

"I have told you, father, that I go to clear my name from the dishonor upon it," said Roy, almost petulantly.

"It may be, it may be," murmured the old man, while Hazel added, quietly:

"Roy, you have some other reason for leaving; but as you do not care to tell us, I will not ask you. Good-by."

Grasping the hand of each of the men, Roy stood a moment, silent and deeply moved; then he turned, sprung into his boat, and raising his little sail, the fleet craft sped rapidly away from the land.

As long as the glimmer of the white sail was discernible the Commodore and Hazel watched it; but at last it disappeared from sight, and the old man spoke sadly:

"That boy has more on his mind, my son, than he would let out to us."

"Yes, father, he has some sorrow at heart, I feel confident; but come, the dawn is near at hand, and you must get some sleep."

Slowly the two men retraced their way to their home, and soon after they were sleeping soundly, unmindful of the storm of sorrow that was about to break upon them.

When they arose and were called to breakfast, by the old negress who was maid-of-all-work at the cabin, and whose husband did the chores on the farm, the morning was gliding away, the fatigue of the past night having caused them to sleep late.

"Hullo within there!"

The sound came from the yard, and going to the door Hazel, to his surprise, beheld a score

of mounted men, and at their head the town constable.

"Good-morning, Hazel! is that unworthy brother of yours there?" queried the constable.

"What do you mean, Ben Hollis?" answered Hazel, in a tone that proved he was in no mood to be trifled with, and knowing that he was a dangerous man when aroused, and at the same time respecting and liking the honest farmer-fisherman, the constable changed his manner as he answered:

"It seems, Hazel, that there is a strong charge made against Roy Dean."

"There have been several lies trumped up against him by men unworthy to raise their eyes to his," was Hazel's hot rejoinder.

"That may be, and I have befriended the lad; but in this last charge he seems to be guilty."

"Of what is the boy charged?" asked Daniel Dean, coming out of the cabin, having heard what passed.

"With the murder of Mark Mordaunt," was the answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PURSUIT.

"THE man who makes that charge lies!"

The voice of Hazel Dean rung out fiercely in his denunciation of the one who had accused Roy Dean of murder; but his father laid his hand calmly upon his shoulder, and said, in his quiet way:

"No hard words, Hazel, but let us hear all that Ben Hollis has to say."

"First, tell me if the boy is here?" answered the constable.

"He is not."

"Do you know where he is, Hazel?"

"I do."

"And he can be found?"

"He will be willing to stand his trial; now tell us who it is that accuses him of the murder of Mark Mordaunt?"

"Well, Mordaunt started home last night, a little the worse for liquor, and this morning before day I was sent for to go to Magnolia Retreat, where I arrived about sunrise, to find quite a crowd gathered.

"Captain Mountjoy told me that, late at night, one of his negroes awoke him with the report that he was returning from the Mordaunt plantation, where he had been to see his sweetheart, when he saw two persons in the road ahead of him, and beheld one of them raise his rifle and fire upon the other, who was mounted.

"At the shot both horse and rider went down, and the frightened negro hid in the woods a long time before he found courage to run on and tell his master.

"Captain Mountjoy at once went to the spot, guided by his servant, and found there the dead horse of Mark Mordaunt, but no one was visible; yet, as daylight broke, a rifle was found in the grass, and it is recognized as the weapon belonging to Roy Dean."

"Hold on, Ben Hollis, I can tell you the whole story, for my father and myself had it from the boy's own lips," and he went on to tell exactly what Roy had made known.

"I hope it will come out that way, Hazel; but, if Mark went home, where is he?"

"And he has not been seen?" asked the Commodore, with considerable alarm.

"No, he has not, and more: there are tracks to the water-side, as though a man had carried a body there and thrown it in. I tell you, Hazel, things look dark for Roy Dean."

"I will not believe he killed Mark Mordaunt until he tells me so with his own lips; besides, stunned as he was by the fall, Mark might have wandered away in the forest."

"Yes, find his body, and then accuse Roy Dean of murder," broke in the Commodore.

"There is no need of that; the whole country is alarmed, now, and Mark Mordaunt cannot be found; but his horse lies on the cliff, with a bullet in his brain, and the rifle from which that bullet was fired, was found near and belongs to Roy Dean, who, from your own confession, Hazel Dean, admitted having a difficulty with my friend."

The speaker was the young man who had urged on the duel between Mark Mordaunt and Roy, and who now seemed anxious to have a chance to avenge himself for what the fisher lad had said to him.

"You hold your tongue, Wilber Otey, or I'll break every bone in your worthless body; I am talking to Ben Hollis, and not you," and Hazel turned upon the young man with a look that proved he would be as good as his word, and which caused Wilber Otey to turn pale.

"Well, Hazel, my duty's plain; I've got to arrest Roy, and then let the courts prove him innocent or guilty, so I ask you where he is?"

"And I refuse to answer, Ben Hollis," returned Hazel, firmly.

"And do you also refuse to tell, Commodore?"

"I most certainly do."

"It will go hard with the boy, for this is a hanging offense."

"It's catching before hanging, constable," suggested the old man.

"You had better give him up, for I shall search your house."

"So be it; you are welcome, Ben Hollis, for I know you've your duty to do; but, there are two of your comrades who will be as bad off as Mark Mordaunt, if they attempt to enter my house," and Hazel looked at Dave Tuttle and Wilber Otey in a manner that made those two worthies conclude to remain on their horses, and leave the search to the others of the party.

Ben Hollis set to work systematically to carry out his duty, and, aided by several others, every corner and crevice of the cabin and place were searched diligently, and, of course, without the hoped-for result.

During the time that the constable was looking for Roy, the Commodore and Hazel sat upon the porch, silent and sad.

"Well, he's not here, that's certain unless you have some secret place to put him in; but I'll catch him yet, for you know 'tis my duty, Hazel."

"Yes, and now that you have done your duty here, Ben Hollis, you and your friends might as well be off," and as Hazel spoke in no pleasant mood, he saw Wilber Otey and Dave Tuttle with their heads together, and heard them call to the constable, who instantly approached them.

"I say, Hazel, didn't you have a little sloop, altered from a yawl?"

"No, I never owned such a boat, Ben Hollis."

"Well, your father did, or Roy did, and I see it is gone; have you sold it?"

"That is my own affair."

"Now, Hazel, don't be angry with me, for you know I've got my duty to discharge; but Tuttle, here, says the sloop was at your dock yesterday, and I guess the boy has gone away in that."

Hazel made no reply, but if looks would kill, Dave Tuttle's life would have ended then and there.

"There comes a lugger now, and the fisherman can tell us if he saw the sloop," exclaimed Wilber Otey, pointing to one of those broad, short crafts, with open decks and one stump mast, used by the Spanish fishermen on Lake Borgne half a century ago.

The constable and his comrades at once adjourned to the shore, the Commodore and Hazel following them, deeply interested in the report of Sandy Benson, who was the fisherman in the lugger.

"Halloa, Sandy, met any sail going out, or seen any up the shore as you came in?" called out the constable, as the lugger dropped anchor half a cable's-length off the beach, and the old fisherman and his assistant, Jake, got into a small pirogue to make a landing.

"Yas, I sighted Cap'n Morse runnin' for ther fishin'-grounds an' Spanish Felipe hain't far astern of us."

"But did you see nothing else; Dean's sloop, for instance?" persisted the constable.

"So I did; it were runnin' free, a league away from us, but my eyes is too dim to say who was in it, constable."

"Was there more than one person?"

"No, only one, and Jake said it were Dean's boy."

A yell of delight broke from several of the crowd, while Daniel and Hazel Dean looked the picture of despair.

"Well, old man, how's your boat for sailing?" called out the constable.

"She's better than she looks, constable, an' stiff as a church-steeple in a blow," responded the old man, proudly.

"Then I will hire her for a short while, so get aboard a week's provisions, and move lively, for you must overhaul the sloop."

"It hain't easy work to do that thing, with that boy aboard, constable."

"Well, you must try—no, wait a moment," and Ben Hollis turned to Dave Tuttle and Wilber Otey, who had again called to him.

After a moment's conversation in a low tone the constable said:

"Never mind, Sandy, I won't take your boat, but Dean's lugger, as Dave Tuttle says she's the fastest on the lake, and is named after the prettiest girl on our shores, Ruby Mountjoy."

"Do you mean to say that you will take my boat to pursue Roy in?" asked Hazel, a dangerous light in his eyes.

"Ha! he admits as much as that Roy is in the sloop," cried Wilber Otey; but hardly had the words left his lips when, with the spring of a tiger, Hazel was upon him and in a second he had dragged him from his horse.

"Hazel! my son! my son!"

At the cry of his father, Hazel Dean checked the savage blow aimed at the frightened young man, who called lustily for help, and hurled him from him with a force that rolled him over in the sand.

"Father, I could not help it, for that coward has some deep motive for wishing to capture Roy; but if he is taken and harm befalls him; Wilber Otey, I warn you that I'll not forget the hand you thrust forward to injure him."

Now thoroughly cowed, Wilber Otey hastily mounted his horse and retired to a safe distance, accompanied by Dave Tuttle, while the constable approached Hazel and said:

"It's my duty, Hazel, as you know, and in

the name of the law, I seize your lugger, the Ruby, and if you don't go with us, I'll get a man to sail her, and be responsible for all damage done the craft."

"I'll sail her, constable," called out Dave Tuttle, from a distance, and Hazel would have again interfered, but his father restrained him.

"You'll make it worse for the boy, Hazel, so say nothing more, and besides, he's got a good start, and a better sailor don't live on this shore," declared the old Commodore.

Hazel made no reply, but sullenly watched the constable select his crew of half a dozen men, among whom were Dave Tuttle and Wilber Otey, and, after getting old Sandy Benson to supply provisions, he went aboard the really graceful lugger, and set sail.

"Father, it's too bad to see yonder craft, the dear little Ruby, going in pursuit of our boy, for, that he will be brought back, and sorrow follow, I know full well," said Hazel, sadly.

"It is too bad, my son, too bad, for a nobler boy does not live, and I believe him innocent, though circumstantial evidence, and even his own words, are terribly against him," and the old Commodore and Hazel returned to their cabin, now grown so desolate and haunted by sorrow that would not away.

CHAPTER XV.

SAVED BY A FOE.

WHEN the Ruby gained an offing, both Wilber Otey and Dave Tuttle breathed more freely, for, in spite of their persistent persecution of Roy Dean they were at heart arrant cowards, as are the generality of thoroughbred villains.

A short consultation was held among all on board, and it was decided that Roy would doubtless head for Mobile, or Pensacola, as he was flying for his life, well knowing that he would be pursued for his crime.

So to Mobile first the Ruby's course was laid, and, under all the canvas she would carry, she went bowling along at a rapid pace.

Shortly after noon there was a sail sighted. A closer inspection proved that it was heading for Mobile also, and, as the lugger gained upon it, Dave Tuttle pronounced the stranger to be the Waif, the very craft they were in chase of.

Gliding along under easy sail, the Waif seemed making no effort to escape, and all believed at first that the capture could be easily made.

But Dave Tuttle remarked:

"I tell yer, shipmates, I knows all ther Deans, and they is all alike, tho' this boy hain't got none o' their blood in his veins; but he's got their trainin' up, and they is terrible to hold on, an' ef he does make up his mind to run off, we hain't going to take him so easy, and I says go careful."

"We can do no more than we are doing; the lugger is faster than the sloop, and I do not see how she can escape us."

"It looks so, constable; but yonder, a league away, is shallow water where the Waif can run, and we can't follow, and if he throws us off until night, we might as well give up seeing that lad stretch hemp; besides, in this breeze yonder craft can outrun us, though we've got the advantage in a blow."

"Yet we overhaul her rapidly now, Dave," persisted Ben Hollis.

"True for you, constable, only she hain't got her reefs shook out, and we has all drawing."

"Then what do you advise, for you know it is my duty to overtake the murderer?"

"Waal, I don't believe the boy has cast his eye astern since we've been in sight, and afore he does, all but two of us had better get out of sight."

"There's a pea-jacket and cap belonging to Hazel, and I can put them on, while Sandy here, whom you fortunately made come along, don't look so unlike the old Commodore, and we can easily get close on him, as he will recognize the Ruby, but dodge us, if he sees a crowd, or strangers in charge."

"You are right, Dave, and you have a good head for plotting," replied the constable, and he immediately arranged his plans as suggested by the scheming fisherman, though Sandy Benson was only made to play the part of the old Commodore by the stern order of Ben Hollis, the old man standing in holy awe of the law and its officers.

Awhile longer the chase continued, and then Roy, whom several now recognized, was seen to glance astern.

Instantly he sprung to his feet, evidently surprised by the near approach of the Ruby, and he looked long and earnestly at her.

"Wave to him, Sandy," whispered Dave Tuttle.

"I'll see yer durned first; I'm no decoy duck, Dave Tuttle, to help catch a neighbor's son," was the indignant answer of the old fisherman.

"I'll do just as well, Sandy," replied Dave Tuttle, and he whirled his cap several times around his head.

Instantly the bows of the Waif swept up into the wind, and the little craft lay to upon the waters.

"Caught! I've done my duty," cried Ben Hollis, with joy and sorrow commingled in his

face, for he was delighted at having done his duty, and sorry that he had to do it, for he greatly liked Roy Dean.

"Yas, we've got him," said Dave Tuttle, with a malicious grin, and he headed straight for the Waif, now not more than a mile distant.

Standing in the stern of his little craft, Roy Dean was visible, watching the coming Ruby, and evidently unsuspecting danger to him from her presence, and the two persons visible on her decks, and supposed to be his adopted father and brother.

"Don't look so mad, old man, or he'll see from here that you hain't the Commodore," enjoined Dave Tuttle.

But it was an unfortunate remark, for old Sandy felt sore at the part he was compelled to play, and losing his temper, drove his hard fist directly into the face of Dave Tuttle, who was standing up, steering with the tiller against his knee.

Instantly he went backward with the force of the blow, and, unable to recover himself, tumbled overboard, the lugger coming to.

"In the devil's name, what have you done?" cried the constable, springing out of the hold, followed by the others, who quickly extended the half-stunned man a helping hand.

"I've made that durned lubber hold his tongue," averred old Sandy, quietly.

"And I'll knife you for it yet, old man," growled the villain, wiping the blood and water from his face, for the knuckles of iron had struck fairly on his nose.

"Shet up, yer coward, or I'll hev ther constable take me back ter town for murderin' ye."

This threat of old Sandy's had the desired effect, for the bully immediately remained silent, and all eyes turned upon the sloop.

From every lip there broke a cry of commingled surprise and rage, for the Waif was flying away toward the distant land, her young skipper having cut the reefing nettles, and run his full jib and mainsail up, which sent the little craft away at a rate of eight knots to the hour.

"He! he! he! that boy hain't nobody's fool," laughed old Sandy, but a look of anger from the constable shut up his merriment, and at his command he squared the lugger away in chase, for Dave Tuttle was still nursing his nose and a black eye.

"He is making for the shallow water," Wilber Otey announced.

"I was in hopes he did not know of it," answered the constable.

"What! that boy didn't know of ther flats yonder? Constable, that boy is ther best coast pilot in these waters, an' I'm tellin' you, ther chance o' overhauling ther Waif in this breeze are slim."

"I don't believe you wish to catch him, Benson," observed Ben Hollis, with some anger.

"Can't say as I does hanker arter seein' ther boy reefed up to a yard-arm, for if he did kill that Mark Mordaunt, I'm thinkin' he hed good cause," was the honest answer.

"Well, give Dave Tuttle the helm again, for I notice the sloop is gaining a little."

"She are, for a fact; she are a good walker in this breeze, constable; but we'll see what can be did," and Dave Tuttle bent every energy to overhaul the swift craft ahead, whose solitary young skipper sat in the stern, holding steadily on his course, and now and then glancing over his shoulder to note the distance between himself and his enemy.

"This are good, that's a fact," suddenly exclaimed Dave Tuttle, as Wilber Otey threw the lead forward and announced twelve feet of water.

"What is good, Dave?" asked Ben Hollis.

"Why, it's high tide on the flats, and we'll hev six feet of water all over them, and the lugger draws but four, so we'll run him hard."

All, excepting old Sandy, seemed rejoiced at this news, and the lugger was kept on in chase, although the shallow water drew behind her a heavy swell, and her speed was somewhat slackened, while the Waif, with less draught, sped along with seemingly increased speed.

And thus for hours the chase continued, Roy Dean holding his own steadily, and though near the land still sticking to his little sloop, as though determined to escape only in her, though he could have easily hidden in the forests before the pursuers could come up with him.

"Well, what is the boy doing now?" asked Ben Hollis, anxiously, as he saw the sloop suddenly change her course, haul everything close, and stand out to sea.

"He sees yonder cloud-bank arising, and, like a good sailor, wants deep water for a storm," answered old Sandy.

"Do you think we are going to have a storm?" asked Ben Hollis, anxiously, for he was not fond of the water.

"We is, for a fact," was Dave Tuttle's cool response, after glancing around the horizon.

"Can't we hail Dean and tell him he'll be drowned if he don't come on board the lugger?"

"Then he won't be hanged, constable?" dryly remarked old Sandy.

"But he will go down, and I won't be able to do my duty."

"Guess he'll live through it, for he knows what he's about."

"Then there will be no danger regarding the lugger?" and Ben Hollis looked down into the dark waters with a shudder.

"That 'pends upon how she's handled. By ther roarin' Rigoletts, how that storm is risin'," and with a common impulse Dave Tuttle and old Sandy set to work reefing the lugger's sail and getting all ship-shape to meet the storm that was rapidly sweeping down upon them from landward.

But, Roy Dean still recklessly held on with full canvas set, until even old Sandy said, excitedly:

"Thet boy will go under yet, for ther sloop is doomed with ther water she ships."

"He'd rather drown than hang," suggested Wilber Otey, sneeringly, and his words brought out old Sandy with:

"Ef yer don't change your habits, young feller, old as I is, I'll live to see you stretch hemp."

"Let Sandy alone, Otey, for we need all his attention now for the lugger," called out Ben Hollis, who feared more trouble, and who greatly dreaded the danger that surrounded them, for the wind had increased to half a gale and the Ruby was driving along at a furious speed, in spite of her close-reefed sails.

But, through all, the Waif was rushing through the waters at a speed that threatened to run her under, her daring young helmsman still holding on with all his canvas, as if fully confident what his brave little craft could stand, or wholly reckless of consequences.

Suddenly the heavens grew blacker, and as night was coming on, Ben Hollis feared that they would all be lost conjointly, and that he would not be able "to do his duty."

"The sloop's gone under!" suddenly yelled Dave Tuttle, and all eyes were strained to catch sight of the little craft, but, nowhere was it visible, until a flash of vivid lightning rent the clouds, and every eye in the lugger beheld the Waif lying to.

"He luffed up quickly, and that's where we lost him. By Jemima, how he was working was a caution," Dave Tuttle ejaculated.

"Working at what, Dave?"

"Reefing down close. Now, I kinder feel as though we can overhaul him in this gale and sea, constable, so let us keep our eye upon him, for he's tricky and might dodge us in the darkness."

But, as he spoke there descended forked tongues of lightning straight down from the black clouds, and with a crash of terrific thunder the lugger reeled, staggered, broached to, and lay a wreck upon the waves, three of the eight men on board lying senseless on the deck, and the remainder considerably shaken up and affected by the electric bolt.

With his hands to his eyes Ben Hollis staggered to his feet, out of the hold, whither he had fallen, and called faintly:

"Dave!"

"I are here, constable; but I guesses we'll go under."

"And old Sandy?"

"He lies thar, dead, I'm thinking."

"It is true; he is dead; and so are two others, poor fellows."

"I fear we all are poor fellows," added Wilber Otey, with his hand to his head.

"And the sloop?"

"Is safe, flying away to leave us to perish, for the lugger is sinking fast, constable," responded Dave Tuttle, in a voice that trembled.

"Curses rest on that Roy Dean, who has brought us to this!" broke forth Wilber Otey, violently.

"Ho! the sloop!" and Dave Tuttle sprung to his feet in surprise, for almost upon them, bounding over the mad waters, was visible the waif, Roy Dean, in his white shirt and duck trousers, looking like a specter at her helm.

"Aboy, the Ruby!"

In spite of the swash of the waters and howling wind the ringing hail came distinctly to the ears of those on the lugger.

"Ay, ay, the Waif," answered Dave Tuttle, in a loud, hoarse voice.

"Are you sinking?" and the Waif flew by like the wind, but Roy Dean heard the reply:

"Yes, some killed and others in a bad way."

The Waif was seen to go about as lightly as a life-boat, and upon the other tack came to leeward of the wrecked Ruby.

All watched and listened for the next move or word from the daring young reefer. It soon came, and brought a yell from those men on the lugger who believed themselves doomed, for in the same ringing tones came the cheering words:

"Stand by to aid me, for I will run under your lee, and save you."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRIAL.

TRUE to his word, Roy Dean lay to, as close under the lee of the wreck as he dared, and one by one the men on board sprung into the sea, and reaching the Waif were drawn on board by

the very one whom they had been seeking to bring to the gallows.

"And poor old Sandy is dead?" asked Roy, feelingly, when Ben Hollis told him of those slain by the lightning's stroke.

"Yes; we left him, and Dot Jones, and Diego to go down with the Ruby."

"And there she goes," called out Dave Tuttle, as the lugger gave a lurch and sunk beneath the waves, while all those who had just escaped from her shuddered visibly, at the thought of the fate they had escaped.

For some time the sloop lay to, her decks washed by the waves that broke over her, but with no doubt in the mind of Roy as to her riding out the gale, for he well knew the sea-going qualities of the little craft.

After several hours the gale blew itself out, and then Roy turned to Ben Hollis and asked, coolly:

"Whither bound when you were struck by lightning, constable?"

Ben Hollis was taken aback by the suddenness of the question, but rallying, answered:

"We were in chase of you, Roy, as I supposed you knew."

"And why?"

"Well, I was doing my duty, and that duty was to take you a prisoner back to town."

"Indeed! and what is the charge against me?"

"The murder of Mark Mordaunt."

In spite of his self-control Roy started visibly; but in the same calm tones in which he had previously spoken, he said:

"Did Mark Mordaunt die from the effects of the fall he received?"

"Yes, he is dead, and you were seen to shoot him, and your rifle was found near by, so I was sent to arrest you, for you know it is my duty."

"Yes; well, we will return to town and I will meet the charges against me; but I am sorry Mark Mordaunt is dead, for I meant not to kill him," and Roy Dean attended to the sailing of his boat with a cool indifference that won the admiration of all present, even to Dave Tuttle, who remarked, *sotto voce*, to Wilber Otey:

"That boy is a great one, I tell you, and I wish he'd let me like him."

As the wind was fair for the return home the Waif bounded swiftly along, and just as the sun arose above the horizon, ran into Fisherman's Bay, where upon the shore stood a large crowd awaiting them, and among whom were visible the Commodore and Hazel.

"They've got the boy, Hazel," said the old man, sadly, as the sloop ran in to the little pier.

"Yes, father, but I'll wager they didn't catch him fairly, for where's the lugger?" answered Hazel.

As Ben Hollis sprang ashore, Roy followed him, and instantly the constable turned upon him.

"Young man, you saved my life, and all of us in fact, from death; but, duty with me is duty, and I must do mine, so I arrest you, Roy Dean, in the name of the law."

"So be it, Ben Hollis. I came back to stand my trial," and without the quiver of a muscle the fearless boy held forth his wrists for the iron handcuffs to be clasped upon them.

"My poor, poor boy," groaned the old Commodore, while Hazel was only restrained by his fishermen comrades from rushing upon the constable, for he started toward him with vengeance in his eyes.

"Hold on, Hazel, I love you as I do my brother, for you are a noble man, but duty is duty, and if you attempt to rescue my prisoner I'll shoot you down, I swear it," and the plucky constable drew a pistol from his belt, and stood ready to keep his word, as all knew he would.

"Hazel, for my sake, do not interfere; it only makes it worse for me," cried Roy, and then turning to the constable, he continued: "Come on, Ben Hollis, and let me go to the cabin and change my clothes; then take me to jail," and as he said the last word his lip quivered.

The really good-hearted constable readily assented, and the party set off for the Dean house, after which they left for the village.

As they reached the edge of the little town, a carriage met them, and in it sat Captain Ethan Mountjoy and Ruby.

The eyes of the prisoner and the maiden met, and then hers fell upon the manacled hands, and she sunk forward in the carriage unconscious.

This much Roy Dean saw, and his face grew white and hard, while glancing back, he noticed that the carriage had stopped and Hazel had dismounted and rushed to its side.

Presently the inn was reached, and out of the parlor window gazed two faces in which Roy Dean saw only sympathy and trust in him, for he felt that Ned Hayes and his sister Nellie, did not believe him the guilty being his enemies were trying hard to prove him to be.

A few moments more and Roy Dean—a boy in years, a man in deeds and nerve—found himself the inmate of a prison cell, with the shadow of the gallows already upon him, for well he knew that the rumor set afloat that he had been a smuggler, would weigh greatly against him when the day of trial came.

And weigh against him it did; for there were

those who poured into many ears each day the story of his having joined Darke, the Smuggler, and then betrayed him; and the letter of Albert Mountjoy to his father, told against the youth terribly; so he saw, before the trial was fairly begun, and in spite of the brave defense of the lawyers, whom Hazel had engaged to defend him, that he was doomed.

At length the two last witnesses were examined, and these were Dave Tuttle and Wilber Otey.

In an eager, malicious way they told their story, throwing in all they could against the prisoner, until it was evident to many that they spoke from real hatred to the condemned man; but though Dave Tuttle's testimony regarding his having seen Roy Dean voluntarily go with the smugglers in their boat, could not be contradicted, that of Wilber Otey, where he referred to the trouble in the Hayes Inn, and the duel by the roadside, received the lie direct from Raleigh Reid, who had become the firm champion of Roy.

Once, and once only, did the prisoner show emotion during the trial, and that was when the mother and sister of Mark Mordaunt were placed upon the stand, and their sad, pale faces cut Roy to the heart, for though he had not intended to kill the man who hated him so bitterly, he felt that his life was laid at his hands by those who mourned for him dead.

At length when the jury returned the verdict of guilty, Roy Dean's face did not quiver, nor the slightest emotion pass over it, though he distinctly heard the moan that broke from the lips of the Commodore and Hazel, and the sobs of poor Ruby and Nellie Hayes, who had faithfully attended the trial.

When asked to stand up and state any reason why sentence should not be passed against him, Roy Dean arose and glanced fearlessly around the court-room, and his answer fell like a bomb-shell in their midst, for, in his clear, distinct voice, he said:

"I have but to say that before I am hanged for murder, I think the body of the dead man should be found."

It was true; no trace of the body had been found, though the coast had been carefully searched for miles in each direction from the scene of the murder.

But, the decree had gone forth, and the sentence was passed, Roy Dean standing and receiving it with a calmness that not one in the court-room exhibited.

Back to his prison-cell he was led, in heavy irons, condemned to die within the month, and over him the "death watch" was placed, that must guard him until he ascended the steps of the gallows.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GIRL'S RESOLVE.

HAZEL DEAN sat upon the little pier, jutting out from the land into Fisherman's Bay, and his face was pale and haggard, for the days were creeping on apace, and the hour was not far away when Roy Dean must die.

In vain was it that he had tried to save the noble boy, and that Captain Mountjoy had accompanied Ruby to plead with the Governor for his life.

Hazel's efforts had been fruitless, and Ruby had found the Governor inexorable, while every daring effort of Nellie Hayes, aided by her brother, Ned, and Raleigh Reid, to aid Roy to escape, had also been fruitless, for the guards could not be bribed, and seemed never to sleep upon their watch.

Presently, the clatter of hoof-strokes was heard, and, looking up, Hazel saw a horsewoman approaching.

Her form was slender and graceful, she sat her spirited horse with perfect ease, but who she was Hazel could not guess, for her face was closely veiled.

"Can it be Ruby? No, it is too tall for her," said the fisherman, arising to his feet and politely doffing his hat, as the lady rode up and halted near him.

"Hazel Dean, I am glad to have found you at home," and, throwing back the veil, the lovely, but sad face of Mary Mordaunt was revealed.

"Miss Mordaunt!" exclaimed Hazel, in surprise.

"Yes, and I have come to see you, to say that Roy Dean must not die."

"This from you—Mark Mordaunt's sister?"

"Yes. Did I utter one word at the trial that would go against Roy? and what my poor mother said, she was driven to by sorrow, for, in spite of his wild and reckless life, we loved Mark dearly, and he went forth from us that fatal night, looking so handsome and noble, that it nearly broke my mother's heart and mine, to feel that we should never see him more."

"And you believe that Roy Dean was so ignoble as to take his life?"

"I do not, Hazel Dean; nay, more, I do not now feel that my brother is dead, and I will not see Roy hanged for murder."

"Alas! he must die, for Ruby, Captain Mountjoy, myself and others, have done all in our power to save him, and in vain."

"I say no! He shall not die!"

Hazel turned fairly white at the determined manner of the lovely girl, and the sudden hope that grasped at his heart, while, in scarcely more than a whisper, he asked:

"How can you save him?"

"I will tell you, and I need your aid."

"God knows you shall have it, Mary Mordaunt, if I put my own neck in the noose by the act."

"Well, my plan is to visit Roy in his cell, for I will not be suspected of aiding the murderer of my brother, and will not be watched; I will tell the guard I wish to entreat him to tell me where Mark's body can be found."

"In that visit I shall tell Roy of my plan, give him implements to file off his irons, and let him know just what to do."

"And what can the poor boy do? There is a watchman just out of his cell door all the time," remarked Hazel, despondently.

"I know that; but I shall tell Roy to ask to see a priest, and there are two, strangers to this part of the country, now at our home, waiting until the plantation blacksmith mends their carriage, which is badly broken."

"I will tell the jailer that Roy wishes to see a priest, and that I will send those visiting at our house."

"And what good will they do?"

"None whatever; but you and Raleigh Reid must play priest."

"By Heaven! Mary Mordaunt, you are a wonderful girl," exclaimed Hazel, in admiration.

"I am resolved to save Roy Dean, Hazel; you and Raleigh, in priestly robes, which I will in some way get possession of, can pass as holy fathers, by night, and then you can easily overpower the guard, for both you and Raleigh are powerful and determined men."

"And will Raleigh aid me?"

"Yes, for I sought him before I came here, burying the past, to aid Roy, and speaking to him for the first time since he killed his friend, Tabor May, in the duel which of course you remember."

"Then we will make the effort; when will you visit Roy?"

"This afternoon, and to-night the attempt must be made."

"But where will he go?" asked Hazel, musingly.

"Yonder lies his sloop; get it in readiness, and as soon as it is dark run it down and anchor in the creek near our home. I will meet you on the bank, and the carriage will be ready to drive you to town."

Hazel took the little gloved hand of Mary Mordaunt in both his own, and said in his blunt way:

"Mary Mordaunt, you are as noble as your brother was wicked—forgive me, I meant not to offend; I will be in the creek on time."

Wheeling her impatient horse, Mary Mordaunt rode rapidly away, while Hazel, with his face lighted with joy, went to the cabin to tell his father the good news, and to provision the Waif for another daring cruise under her young master.

Having gotten everything in readiness on board, and seeing no idle eyes watching his movements, Hazel and the Commodore set sail, for the old man was determined to grasp the hand of Roy before he went away again, perhaps forever, from those few who so dearly loved him.

Shortly after dark the sloop ran into the creek, completely hidden by the forest shadows, and taking the pirogue, which they had towed astern, the two men rowed ashore.

"You are here early."

It was Mary Mordaunt who spoke, and she advanced from a clump of trees, followed by Raleigh Reid, who greeted the Commodore and Hazel, and said in a low tone:

"This looks as though we would succeed, Hazel."

"You saw Roy, then?" and the fisherman turned anxiously to the maiden, who answered:

"Yes; at first he refused to accept his release at my hands; but, when I told him that I did not believe Mark to be dead, and urged that he should at least make an effort to find him, he consented to escape, though he did not wish you and Raleigh to risk so much for him."

"God bless you, my noble child, and, as you have brought sunshine to our dark hearts, so ever may your life be bright and beautiful."

"Amen!"

The response came fervently from the lips of Hazel Dean and Raleigh Reid, and, as the old Commodore had spoken in deep tones, and as if in invocation, the scene was most impressive, there in the dark magnolia forest, and with a human life hanging in the balance.

For a moment, Mary Mordaunt seemed too deeply moved to speak, and then, conquering her emotion, she said, simply:

"Come!"

"I will await you here," the Commodore announced.

"No, come with me, sir, and we will return together, as soon as we reach the carriage," and the maiden led the way through the trees to where a plantation road was visible.

Here stood the Mordaunt family carriage, with a negro upon the box.

"It is Robert, our coachman, and he is faithful," said the maiden, seeing Hazel's start of surprise.

Then she continued:

"In the carriage you will both find your priestly robes, and may success attend you, is my fervent prayer."

Hazel and Raleigh Reid sprung into the carriage, and Robert drove swiftly off toward the gate leading into the highway, while the Commodore and Mary Mordaunt awaited in the deep shadows of the forest, the dismal hoot of the owl echoing continually in their ears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DARING DEED.

ROY DEAN, ironed hand and foot, sat in his narrow cell, his head bent, and his brain busy, for thoughts were crowding swiftly upon him.

He was paler and thinner, as seen by the corridor lamp, than when he was first placed in durance vile; but the same proud and fearless look rested upon his face, showing that his spirit was unbroken.

His interview, a few hours before, with Mary Mordaunt, had moved him deeply, for he had not expected her to aid him to escape, and it was only through the most urgent entreaties that she had forced him to consent to play a part, even to save his own life.

As she left the cell the guard said to her:

"Did he confess where he hid the body, Roy?"

"No; but I thank you for your kindness in permitting me to enter, and he asked that I might send him a priest."

"Ah, I guess he'll confess to him; but Padre Leon is over in Orleans for a few days."

"Indeed! then who can I send?"

"You'll have to ask the constable, miss, Ben Hollis, for I hain't much acquainted with padres, being a Protestant."

"Very well, I will find a holy father, and send him to see the prisoner."

"It's kind of you, miss, seeing as how he killed your brother; and I only hope he'll confess to the padre where to find the body, for it's a great satisfaction to know where our dead are buried."

"It is, indeed," and, slipping a gold piece into the hand of the watchman, Mary Mordaunt took her leave, Roy having heard all that had been said so near his cell.

The curfew bell, tolling the hour of nine, Roy Dean counted stroke for stroke, and then, as the seconds glided into minutes, and the minutes told off another hour, he grew a little impatient at the delay; but, outwardly, he was perfectly calm.

Presently a door at the end of the hallway opened, and he recognized the jailer's voice calling to the guard at his cell.

"Two fathers, Bill, to see the murderer Dean; let them remain as long as they please, and then you let 'em out and lock up."

"All right," called out the guard, and approaching feet were heard.

Rising lazily from his seat the watchman unlocked the door, which was of iron bars, and said:

"There's the prisoner; but my orders is to lock all visitors in, though I guess preachers isn't dangerous."

"No, my son, we should not be; but lock the door and step out of hearing, for only the confessor should hear the words of a man doomed to die."

The speaker was a slender priest, clad in the full dress of his order, and he spoke in a deep, sepulchral tone that impressed the guard with the idea that it must be a dismal calling, that of preaching the Gospel and saving men's souls.

The other priest was a tall, heavily-built man, also wearing the clothing of his calling, and the faces of both were partially concealed.

Though not expecting dangerous visitors in holy fathers, the discreet guard locked the door behind them, and then retired to the other end of the hall, where for a long while he heard the low hum of conversation.

At length the hour of twelve was struck by the clock in the village tavern, and a voice from the cell called out:

"Guard!"

The watchman, half-asleep, lulled by the hum of voices, advanced to the cell.

"Do you wish to come out?"

"Yes, my son," said the larger of the priests, and he stepped into the hallway, and then turning, like a flash of light, seized the throat of the unsuspecting watchman in a grasp of iron, while the other padre, with a celerity that was remarkable, bound him hand and foot.

A gag was then thrust into his mouth, and the unfortunate watchman found himself a prisoner in the cell he had guarded, and behind him the iron key was turned in the door and withdrawn from the lock.

"Come now, and be cautious." It was the younger priest who spoke, and he led the way down the hall, followed closely by the other padre and Roy Dean, who seemed to walk with difficulty after his close confinement.

Passing through the end of the passage they found themselves in the assembly hall of the

jail, into which opened the rooms of the jailer, whose door was open, and from which came the voice of the keeper:

"Is that you, Bill?"

"Yes, I am seeing the holy fathers out," was the quick response of the smaller padre, and in wonderful mimicry of the tones of the guard.

"Be careful to lock up well, for there's those around who'd get that boy murderer out if they could."

"I know it; but I'll fix things right," and the pretended guard passed on to the outer door and opened it.

As they stepped into the yard there was a quick, sharp bark, and a huge dog sprang at the throat of the larger padre; but, as if expecting something of the kind, the priest seized his hairy throat with a grasp that smothered the attempted howl, and a keen knife was thrust into the brute's heart.

Hastening forward the three men now reached the gate, the heavy bars were drawn back, and the next instant they were free, and hurried along the deserted street to an alleyway, into which they turned.

Here a carriage awaited them, and entering it, they were whirled out of the quiet town at a pace that the sedate old coachman of Mordaunt Manor had never driven since his boyhood days.

An hour's rapid ride, and the vehicle turned into the plantation gate, and soon after, drew up in the shadow of the forest, when two forms stepped eagerly forward, an important question in one word upon the lips of both:

"Well?"

"I am free; and to you I owe my escape from an ignominious death," and Roy Dean held forth his hand, though with a hesitancy that showed a fear it would not be taken by the maiden.

But she promptly accepted the grasp, and then stood aside for the Commodore to greet him, after which the party moved through the forest to the banks of the creek.

"Here I will say good-by to you all," said Roy Dean, in a low voice.

"Not to me, Roy, for I will see you out of danger, while father returns home in the *piroque*," responded Hazel.

"No, I must go alone; but I will one day return and prove my innocence of these charges against me, for I do not believe that Mark Mordaunt is dead."

Further argument was useless, for Roy was determined to go alone, and bidding all farewell, he sprang on board his little sloop, the wind caught the sails, and he glided swiftly out of the creek into the open waters beyond, the Commodore and Hazel slowly following in the *piroque*, and Mary Mordaunt and Raleigh Reid standing on the shore, watching the Wail's departure.

"Now I must return home; and, Raleigh, I thank you from my inmost heart for the noble aid you have given me," and Mary Mordaunt held forth her hand, which the young man grasped warmly, while he said, with emotion:

"Mary, it may seem cowardly to speak as I do now, after having been of service to you; but I cannot help it, and now that I hold this little hand in mine, for the first time since—since I may as well say it—since I killed poor Tabor May, I cannot keep back the words that well from my heart; nay, hear me for one moment, and then exile me forever from your presence, if so you will; only let me speak now."

"I am listening, Raleigh," replied the maiden, in a low, soft voice.

"I will not again tell you, as I have told you before, that I love you, for that you well know, and when I, by my own rash act, cut myself adrift from you, and stained my hand with May's life, I became hopeless, and went to the bad."

"Now there has a change come over me, and if you will promise me that one day you will be my wife, I will become a different being from this hour."

He paused and awaited her reply.

"Raleigh, you ask what cannot be! there is a grave between us."

"What! did you then love Tabor May, as I feared?" he asked, quickly.

"No; you I admired most of the two; but when you, to gain my love, removed a rival, your dearest friend, out of the way, my admiration turned to—"

"Why pause, for you mean hate," he said, bitterly.

"No, no, I never hated you; I pitied you, and my heart bled for you; but nothing more can I be to you than I now am, your friend, or the specter of Tabor May would rise between us."

"Is that all, Mary?"

"No, it is not all, Raleigh Reid," she said, with a vehemence that startled him.

"You love another, then?" he said, as though intuitively guessing the cause.

"As you force the truth from me I will answer: yes, I do love another."

"I have nothing more to say; but if it is, as I believe, Albert Mountjoy, from my heart I pity you, for I would rather stain my hand with his life than see you his wife."

She was startled now by his earnest manner, and said nervously:

"Come, see me to the garden gate, and there leave me."

He silently obeyed, and they soon stood in full view of the rambling old mansion, rising white and lonely in the darkness.

Here she offered her hand, saying earnestly:

"Remember, Raleigh, I am your friend."

He took the proffered hand, pressed his lips upon it, and without a word turned away and disappeared in the darkness.

She waited until she heard the hoofs of his horse going rapidly along the highway, and then went cautiously into the mansion, and, undiscovered, gained her room.

Approaching a window, which commanded a wide view of the Gulf beyond, she took up a spy-glass and narrowly searched the waters.

"Yes, there lies his little boat. He is saved—thank God, my hand has saved him!"

As the words broke from her lips she sunk down upon her knees, and burying her face in her hands burst into tears, her whole form trembling with the deep emotion that welled up from her heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DISCOVERY.

THE day broke on the town of B—a scene of wild excitement, after the escape of Roy Dean had been discovered by the jailer, who dropped off to sleep, after his talk with the supposed guard, to awake a couple of hours after with a presentiment of evil pressing upon him.

He tried to shake it off, and tossed and turned in his bed, vainly striving to go to sleep again; but finding it useless he determined to get up and chat awhile with the watchman at Roy's cell.

Arising, he half dressed himself, and opening the corridor door, called out:

"Bill!"

But no answer came, and in alarm he hurried along the passageway

"Bill, I say!"

A groan answered him, and by the light of the lamp in the hall he saw within the cell, and his eyes fell upon the form of a man lying upon the floor.

"As I live, it is Bill Brady," he exclaimed, and the guard moved violently and groaned loudly, until the light falling full upon him the jailer saw that he was bound and gagged.

"Oh Lordy! my place hain't worth shucks now," he cried, more in sympathy for himself at losing his place than for the bound man.

"And the prisoner gone! What shall I do?"

He answered this question by trying to find the key of the cell door, but this was impossible, as it had been carried off; then he rushed back to his room, roused the two servants in the jail and sent one of them after a blacksmith to come and open the door.

The negro rushed off, to utter a yell, as he tumbled over the body of the dead watch-dog.

"Oh Lordy! oh Lordy! they have killed Grip," cried the jailer, and he hurried the other servant off after Ben Hollis, the constable, while he walked nervously about to await their coming—the half-dozen prisoners in the jail, aroused by the noise, laughing at their keeper and expressing their sympathy for their fellow-unfortunate who had so cleverly evaded the clutches of the law.

The first messenger soon returned, bringing with him the village blacksmith, who at once set to work upon the door; but the second messenger came back with the report that the constable was absent from home for a day or two.

In the meantime he spread the exaggerated rumor that all the prisoners had broken jail, killed Bill Brady and gotten safely away.

Of course this report created the wildest excitement, and a hundred men gathered around the jail, where they soon learned from the released and half-choked guard the true statement of the case.

"It was them durned padres did it, and if preachin' the Gospel gives such muscle as they had, I'm goin' to turn preacher," Bill Brady declared.

"But what priests were they?" asked Judge Hayes, the landlord of the inn, who, with his son, was present, both of them secretly rejoicing at the escape of Roy.

"They was two as was visiting at Mordaunt Manor, for Miss Mordaunt said she would send them, the regular padre being away. One was a large man, the other a small one," said the jailer.

A party at once started for Mordaunt Manor to interview the padres visiting there, and those two worthies were very much surprised when confronted by an armed crowd when taking their "constitutional" before breakfast on the broad piazza.

They were both creoles, spoke broken English, were short and fat, and the jailer, who had accompanied the party, said they were not the ones, and consequently Miss Mary Mordaunt was asked for.

She appeared, and was perfectly self-possessed, and said she had visited the jail with the permis-

sion of her mother, anxious to learn if possible where to find her brother's body; that the prisoner had said he would see a priest, and she asked the two gentlemen visiting at the manor to go, but they had declined, saying it was not in their parish. If there was any more information she could give, please command her.

There was nothing further to ask, for no one could doubt Mary Mordaunt, and, convinced that the clever escape had been planned by some of Roy's masculine friends, the party rode to the home of the Deans.

They found the Commodore and Hazel perfectly serene, and their well-feigned surprise at the news they heard, deceived all as to their having had anything to do with the affair. So, wholly in the dark as to who the two mysterious padres could be, the volunteer inquirers returned to town, and instituted vigorous search for the fugitive youth, and those who had rescued him from an ignominious fate.

But several days passed away without any trace, and Ben Hollis even, after every effort to do his duty to the fullest extent, was compelled to acknowledge that he was wholly at fault in the matter.

When this confession from the constable was made known, the greedy longers after excitement in the community were forced to relinquish all hopes of witnessing the hanging of the Boy Smuggler, as Roy Dean had been romantically called.

Having so readily escaped detection of the part she had played in the rescue, Mary Mordaunt was very well content to remain closely at home, not caring to face a battery of eyes whenever she went forth.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST AT MORDAUNT MANOR.

ONE day, a week after the escape of Roy Dean, Mary Mordaunt was seated upon the piazza of her once elegant home, watching with considerable interest the movements of a trading schooner, that she recognized as a packet between Mobile and New Orleans, and which was heading close in shore, as though looking for an anchorage.

"They are going to make a landing. Oh! if Mark were only on board," she said, anxiously, for she would not relinquish the idea that her brother still lived, and her constant assertions to that effect had given hope to the heart of her poor mother, who was daily fading away under the pressure of the sorrows she had known.

Still watching the schooner, the maiden saw her luff up into the wind and lay to, while a boat put off from her side and approached the shore at a point where the garden ran down to near the water's edge.

From the boat landed a man, holding a grip-sack in his hand, and the crew pulling back to the schooner, suggested the idea that Mordaunt was to have a guest.

As the stranger approached the maiden discovered that he was wholly unknown to her, and also that he was a Jew—a small, black-eyed, sinister-faced individual, whose appearance, in look and manner, indicated that he had but one God, and that *Gold* was his name.

"Vell, ish dis Mish Mordaunt?" he asked, fastening his piercing and sinister eyes upon the maiden.

"Yes, I am Mary Mordaunt; who would you see?"

"Ah, my dear young lady, it ish yourself, and your mother's self, I ish do myself t'e pleasure to see, for I ish come from New Orleans for dat purpose; you ish have a beautiful home here, tho' it ish a leetle neglected," and he glanced around at the once grand but now neglected mansion and grounds, for the wild extravagances of her son had prevented Mrs. Mordaunt from keeping the place up to its former style.

"And how can myself or mother serve you, sir? Be seated, please," and Mary motioned to a seat.

"Vell, I ish coome to talk apout a leetle piz-ziness, my dear; but ve vill wait until after awhile, for I ish to stay a tay or two, ov you please."

Mary was almost tempted to say, "I don't please," but she would not be so inhospitable, and she said:

"Certainly, if you have business with my mother; she will see you after lunch; excuse me, and I will send a servant to show you to your room."

She glided away, the Jew looking after her with a queer smile, and then once more transferring his gaze to the grounds and mansion, until a dignified old negro came, and picking up his grip-sack bade him follow him up-stairs.

The Jew obeyed, looking in enviously at the elegant old furniture in the parlors as he passed, and was soon ensconced in a lovely room.

"Ah, my dear, this ish very pleasant! all ish so goot and so nice; I like me to live here very mooch, my dear."

The stately negro made no reply, though his silence was not an indication of his consent to the wish of the Jew, and leaving the room he muttered something very like an anathema upon the whole Hebrew race.

At the hour for lunch, the guest, who gave his name as Isaac Goldstein, was served with lunch alone in the dining-room, the ladies begging to be excused; but after a hearty meal, that quite astonished the butler in attendance, Mrs. Mordaunt sent word she would see him in the library.

As he entered the room he bowed almost cringingly to Mary, who introduced him coldly to her mother—a woman whose sorrows had not destroyed her beauty, though leaving upon each feature a look of inexpressible sadness.

"Be seated, Mr. Goldstein, and kindly say how I can serve you," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with cold politeness.

"I thank you, my dear. Oh, young lady, you ish deserted me at loonch," and he turned to Mary with a sycophantic smile.

"My mother is waiting to learn why we are honored with this visit, sir; as she is an invalid you will kindly not detain her."

There was something in the cold reserve and tone of Mary Mordaunt that brought an angry look to his face, a look which was instantly replaced by one of cunning, as he said:

"My piz-ziness I vill soon make known. Ish Mark Mordaunt your brother?"

"Oh, tell me! do you know aught of my son?" cried Mrs. Mordaunt, eagerly clasping her hands.

"Yes; I ish lent him mooch monish long ago, on dis plantation."

The answer was cool, avaricious, and the mother sunk back hopeless; but Mary said, with surprise:

"You have loaned my brother money, he giving you a mortgage on this place?"

"Yes, my dear."

"When did you see him last?" and there was a world of meaning in the question, while both mother and daughter hung in breathless suspense upon the answer.

"Vell, it vas t'ree mont's."

"Three months! a month before he was killed," gasped the mother.

"He vas kilt—he's be kilt?" and the Jew was upon his feet, his face white.

"Yes, two months ago."

"Vell, it don't affect my mortgage on his plantation," said Isaac Goldstein, after a moment's thought.

"This place did not belong to my brother; it is my mother's, inherited from her father," remarked Mary.

"Not pelong to your brudder? You ish mad, my dear, for he ish show me t'e vill in New Orleans, and I ish let him have plenty monish, and when he don't come and pay me pack, den I ish come after my plantation."

Both Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter seemed dumbfounded at this information; but anxious to hear the worst, Mary continued her questioning:

"You say that my brother showed you a will in his favor, and leaving him this plantation?"

"Yes, my dear, and t'e slaves mit it, forty in all."

"Who was that will signed by?"

"Leonard Grayson."

"Leonard Grayson! your father," and Mary turned to her mother.

"Yes, Leonard Grayson was my father, and I being an only child he left his all to me; if you require proof of this, search the court records, sir."

It was time for Isaac Goldstein to be surprised and troubled now, and he almost yelled out:

"Then my mortgage is not goot?"

"No, sir."

"Vell, Mark Mordaunt ish commit forgery, and give to me a false mortgage, and I vill prosecute him."

"Mark Mordaunt is dead, sir."

The Jew recoiled in affright, for Mrs. Mordaunt had arisen and stood before him in all her stately beauty.

"I ish forgot! I ish forgot! Holy Isaacs! I ish a ruin't man."

He sunk down into a chair and shook like an aspen leaf, his face turning livid with rage and regret at his loss, for well he knew that he could not hold the property on a false mortgage.

For a moment Mrs. Mordaunt gazed upon the man with a look of contempt; then she said in a low voice that slightly trembled:

"Did you pay my son money on this place and negroes in good faith that they belonged to him?"

"I did; I ish see the vill, and his frient tells me it ish all right."

"What amount did you give him?"

"In all I pays him forty t'ousand tollars, my dear; a pig soom what I cannot lose."

"Did you advance money on the negroes too?"

"Yes, my dear, I ish give him the forty t'ousand for all."

"Have you the proofs?"

"Yesh, I ish have t'e proofs," and from a large leather wallet he took out a number of papers and handed them to the poor mother, who read them all over carefully, and then said:

"Mr. Goldstein, it may be a mother's weakness, and the world would doubtless say I am foolish, but I shall let this place and negroes go

upon those mortgages, giving you my quit-claim to secure your right.

"My carriage will be at the door in half an hour to drive you to town, but, one week from to-day, you can come here and take possession, for myself and daughter are going away, forever."

The Jew was all but wild with joy and wonder at the strange act of a mother giving up her all to protect the honor of her son, and he said, with an air of curiosity:

"You ish, of course, have plenty other properties to live mit?"

"No; I will not have an acre or a slave in the world; only a few thousand dollars in cash to last me until I die, and my daughter can earn a living when I am gone."

"I ish vill pe so glad if yourself and taughter vill remain, for I ish loove t'e young lady so very mooch, I ish most grazy to make her my wife."

Had Isaac Goldstein looked at either mother or daughter while he was making this generous proposal, as he thought, he would not have completed the sentence; but when he did raise his cunning eyes, he saw before him two pale, angry women, silently pointing to the door.

"I ish—" he began, but Mary Mordaunt checked him with:

"Silence, sir, or I will have the servants throw you out of this house! Come, mother, we will leave as soon as you are able," and she led her mother from the room, Isaac Goldstein trembling at the commotion his offer of marriage had caused.

Determined to remain no longer in the house than was absolutely necessary, Mrs. Mordaunt and Mary set to work packing up, and the following day, amid the wailing of the servants, the family carriage drove away from Mordaunt Manor, followed by a wagon, behind which was led Mary's favorite saddle-horse.

That carriage and wagon held all that belonged to Mrs. Mordaunt in the wide world, and, excepting the coachman and his wife and son, all else had been given up to the avaricious Jew, who stood on the piazza, rubbing his hands with glee, as he glanced over the broad acres and old home from which he had cruelly driven the mother and daughter.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPECTER OF THE ISLE.

WHEN Roy Dean set sail from the Mordaunt creek, the night of his escape, it was with a firm determination never to be taken alive, and he was glad to see that the thoughtful Hazel had not only provisioned his little boat fully, but refitted it, until not a rope or an oar was wanting, and, lashed to the deck, was a small *pirogue*, fully capable of carrying his weight, should he have to desert the Waif.

In the cabin he found a rifle, an old musket, and a pair of pistols and cutlass, until he felt he was armed like a pirate.

"Dear, thoughtful Hazel! He knew I would never return to die an ignominious death," murmured Roy, and he held on his course once more, which was directly for the Smugglers' Island.

Under a fair breeze, when day dawned he found he had dropped the land from sight, and by keeping far out, he did not anticipate being sighted by any vessel that might be sent in pursuit, while, having on his previous departure allowed the lugger to overhaul him unperceived, he now kept his eyes constantly sweeping the horizon in all directions.

All day long, without rest, he held on his course, and just at twilight rounded the point of land upon which the smuggler schooner *Outlaw* had been stranded by her daring captain, Darke, the Smuggler.

Worn out, and desiring to take exercise, after his imprisonment, he ran ashore and anchored, that he might have a run on the island, and then, after a good supper, seek the rest he so much needed.

But, hardly had he furled his sails, when the creaking of a block arrested his attention, and glancing in the direction from whence came the sound, he discovered just going upon another tack, a large schooner, with snow-white sails, and long, dark hull.

Turning his glass upon her his first exclamation was:

"Isn't she a beauty!"

Then he discovered that she was armed and crowded with men.

"She is a pirate, or an American cruiser; I wish I knew which; and she has evidently just come out of the bay on Smugglers' Island."

Still watching her, he saw her running close inshore with considerable uneasiness, fearing they had discovered the sloop, and as she still held on her course until within her own length from him, he was about to spring overboard and swim for the island, confident he was discovered, when, in a voice he well knew, he heard the order to go about.

"Bring me a light for my cigar," came in the same voice, as the sharp bows of the schooner swept round, and a blazing pine torch was borne aft to the quarter-deck.

Instantly the blaze raised to light a cigar flashed full in the face of *Darke, the Smuggler!*

"I knew his voice; now his face is distinctly revealed; thank Heaven I did not hail, as I was half-inclined, believing him an American cruiser," murmured Roy, as he still watched the schooner, which had run close inshore to lay her course on that tack out through the inlet on the two islands.

"Now if I can find the brig there will be hot work, for Darke, the Smuggler, is again afloat, and this time with an armed deck, and a large crew beneath his feet; he has kept his word and turned pirate."

Watching the schooner until she passed through the inlet and gained an offing, Roy then drew the sloop further in under the shadow of the tree-clad shores, and rowed to the sandy beach in his little pirogue, where he took a sharp run to limber his joints, indulged in a refreshing bath, and returned to his boat to enjoy a hearty supper, after which he sought sleep, leaving the Waif to look after itself.

At midnight he awoke with a start, conscious that some sound, other than the wind in the overhanging trees, the wash of the waves, or wearing of the anchor cable had awakened him.

Looking cautiously out of his little cabin he glanced landward, but could discern nothing of a suspicious character.

Then he turned his eyes out across the sound, or bay, and the object that met his gaze caused him at first a thrill of superstitious dread, for he looked upon what certainly appeared to be a specter boat and a single occupant.

A small craft, not more than fifteen feet in length, painted white, and with snowy sprit-sail, was gliding noiselessly along over the dark waters, and not more than a hundred feet distant.

In the stern sat its only occupant, dressed in white, and as silent as the dead.

Was it the presence of this strange craft and single occupant that had awakened him? he thought.

No, for suddenly upon the night air a voice in song, and it was a woman's voice, strange to say. In perfect melody, clear, bell-like, it rose and fell, singing a weird song, suited to the scene and the spectral appearance of the singer.

"It is the strange being they call the Specter of Smugglers' Island, and I will follow her and solve the mystery," and Roy Dean, now shaking off all idea of superstition, was thoroughly determined upon solving the mystery, which of late had caused all sailors to give the Smugglers' Island a wide berth.

Having made up his mind to his course, he waited until the white sail grew dim in the distance, and then, arming himself with the pair of pistols and cutlass, got into the pirogue, and set out in pursuit.

The wind was blowing fresh, and the waves were rather rough for the light craft in which Roy had intrusted himself; but he handled his paddle well, and soon crossed the inlet and gained the lee of Smugglers' Island.

With his eye still on the snowy sail, he followed, until he saw the spectral-looking craft run into the little bay, out of which Captain Darke had escaped with the Outlaw, the night of the attack by the Sleuthhound's crew.

Watching closely, he beheld the white sail suddenly disappear against the wall of green foliage that marked the curving shores, and keeping his eye on the spot he held on his way, paddling noiselessly, until he entered the mouth of a small creek, which he well knew to be the rendezvous for the small boats of the smugglers, when on the island.

As he expected he soon came upon the boat, drawn up on the sandy shore, and with the white sail closely furled, while, a dozen paces distant, a ghostly form was seemingly gliding, rather than walking away.

It was the work of an instant for Roy Dean to land and follow, and as the white form disappeared in a dense thicket he quickened his steps, and soon came upon a small cabin, half hidden by the trees, and from the door of which streamed forth a bright light.

In the full glare stood the one he had followed, and upon a stool, in the center of the cabin, sat an old negress, lazily smoking a pipe.

Making a slight *détour*, Roy gained the rear of the house, and through an open window obtained a good view of the interior.

To his surprise it was furnished almost luxuriously, with divans, mats and ship furniture, and an adjoining chamber, though dimly lighted, he could see was equally as comfortable.

Upon a divan the woman he had followed had thrown herself, and Roy had a good view of her face and form.

Dressed in pure white, she possessed a well-rounded figure, and down her back hung long braids of black hair.

Perhaps she was thirty years of age; her face was yet beautiful, though sad, and her eyes had a restless look and were full of fire.

"What can that lovely woman be doing on this lonely island?" was the question Roy asked himself, and the words that immediately after fell from the woman's lips almost answered him, for, in a fretful way, she said, addressing the negress:

"I am a fool, Linda, to remain here in this place for months, playing ghost and specter, to

prevent his treasures from being discovered by some curious fishermen that might land here."

"Love makes fools of all people, honey," was the quiet reply of the old negress.

"Well, I believe you are right, for I love him, though doubting his truth to me; but if I ever know that he has played me false, I will kill him with my own hand."

The woman spoke with vehemence, and springing to her feet, paced the floor, her dew-stained dress trailing after her.

"No hab cause to kill chief, honey; he lub you very much."

"He should do so, for I gave up kindred, home and friends for him, and where I could have remained a queen among women, I left all to follow his fortunes—the fortunes of one who has become an outlaw."

"Oh, God! why did we take that fatal step? but I loved him so, and believed that he loved me as I did him."

"Ah me. I have chosen my course, and should not repine; but, if he comes not back for me within the promised time, I will have a revenge that will sweeten every hour of my life down to the grave."

"He come back; don't, honey, get so mad, but go asleep and feel better in morning," said the negress, kindly.

"I will do as you wish, Linda; but I am so, so desolate, living here an exile upon this lonely island, the specter guard of a treasure stained with blood, the betrothed of an outlaw."

She dropped down upon the divan as though to drown bitter thoughts in sleep, and throwing over her a shawl, the negress turned down the lamp and laid down upon a soft mat, herself to seek repose.

"There is no need to search more, for I have found out the secret, and solved the mystery of the Specter of the Island."

"Now to find the Sleuthhound, and the second act of my task is accomplished," and stealing cautiously away from the cabin, Roy Dean, an hour after, was fast asleep on board his little sloop.

CHAPTER XXII. A FATAL SHOT.

"SAIL HO!"

The cry came from the look-out at the mast-head of the American brig-of-war Sleuthhound, that, under easy sail, was cruising slowly along, in sight of the mainland of the present State of Mississippi, and within a league of the chain of islands that guard the coast at that point.

"Whereaway?" called out the officer of the deck, sweeping the horizon with his glance.

"In shore, sir, two points off our starboard bow," answered the look-out, and he added:

"Just over that island with the solitary pine, sir."

"Ay, ay! What do you make her?"

"A small sloop, sir, heading out of the inlet between the islands."

"Mr. Mountjoy, Captain Delorme asked to be called if any sail was sighted; please ask him to come on deck," and Lieutenant Fred Lennox turned to Albert Mountjoy, who was idly leaning over the taffrail, and who instantly obeyed.

"A sail inshore, Lennox?" inquired Captain Delorme, coming on deck.

"Yes, sir; yonder it is, shooting into view from that inlet between the islands."

"I see it; a small sloop-rigged craft, getting all she can out of this breeze and heading directly for us; I wonder if there are any smuggler, or piratical haunts on this immediate coast?"

"I have heard, sir, that the entire shores of the Gulf are infested with outlaws," rejoined Albert Mountjoy.

"Then I hope yonder fellow brings us tidings of some of those scamps whom we may pounce upon."

"Sail ho!"

Again came the cry from the foretop, and Captain Delorme at once called out:

"Whereaway, my man?"

"Coming up, sir, astern, and a few points to larboard, and rising rapidly."

"The more the merrier; but, let us first look after yonder little fellow," and the helmsman was ordered to luff a few points so as to head directly for the sloop.

In watching the little craft, all on-deck forgot the sail astern until the look-out hailed:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay!"

"The stranger's looming up big, sir; a large schooner under clouds of canvas."

This turned the eyes again upon the other sail, and it was now plainly visible from the decks, coming rapidly on, as though wishing for a closer look at the brig.

But in twenty minutes more the sloop was close at hand, and it was seen to contain but one occupant, who suddenly, to the surprise of those on the brig, hailed in a clear, ringing voice:

"The Sleuthhound, ahoy!"

"He knows us, and his voice has a familiar ring; answer him, Lennox," commanded Captain Delorme.

"Ho, the sloop!" cried Fred Lennox.

"Will you luff up and let me lay alongside? I have news for you."

"I know that voice, Captain Delorme; it is Roy Dean," said Albert Mountjoy, and his face clouded with anger.

But his words had been heard by the officers, and a number of the crew, and a cheer burst forth, which Roy acknowledged by raising his cap.

"That's right, my lads; the boy deserves a rousing salute. Lay her to, helmsman, and we'll soon have the youngster on board. But, what can he be doing here and alone?"

The question was soon answered by Roy Dean, who, sunburnt and weary-looking, came over the gangway and saluted Captain Delorme, while the entire crew gave him a tremendous cheer, for they had not forgotten the gallant services he had rendered some months before.

"Well, my lad, you have saved us trouble, for we were cruising down to pick you up. I have your warrant as a cadet in the navy, and appointed for gallant services rendered your country," and Captain Delorme, who had led Roy into the cabin, handed him his cadetship.

"Captain Delorme, I owe this wholly to you, sir, and I have sought your ship, a fugitive from a stain that has been cast upon me, and of which I will speak to you at another time. One week ago I left my home, and I was searching the coast for your vessel when I recognized her well-known rig above yonder island; but now, sir, let me tell you that I also recognize the schooner astern of you."

"Indeed, and what is she?"

"A pirate."

"Hail do you know this to be true?"

"I do, sir, for, six nights since, she passed within a hundred feet of me, and, by the light of a torch, when he lit his cigar, I recognized her commander; while, two days ago, when I landed on an island near here, his vessel anchored, and the crew came ashore for water, and with my glass I again saw him upon his decks."

"And who is this man?"

"The one known as Darke the Smuggler."

Captain Delorme's exclamation was checked by the appearance of Fred Lennox, who said, quickly:

"Pardon me, sir, but the schooner is within a league, is armed, and her decks are crowded with men."

"All right; we'll give this daring fellow a taste of our metal. Get the brig under way again, Lennox, and head for the schooner."

"And Cadet Dean's little craft?"

It was the first time Roy had heard himself addressed by his new rank, and he blushed like a young girl at sight of her lover.

"Ah, I forgot; what do you wish to do with your gallant craft, Mr. Dean?"

"It seems a pity to desert her, but it must be done, sir; I will bring aboard what things I need, and then scuttle her," and leaving the cabin Roy quickly made the transfer of what articles he desired, and ten minutes after the gallant little craft, that had saved his life, plunged beneath the waters, while the deep boom of a heavy gun on the schooner served as a requiem over her loss.

"The fellow is bold indeed, and that gun, fired to windward, is a challenge for us to fight him; beat to quarters, Lennox, and we'll stand down and grapple that pirate, whom Dean says is none other than our old friend Darke the Smuggler turned buccaneer."

"Mr. Dean seems to know a great deal about pirates and smugglers."

Roy flushed and turned upon the speaker. It was Albert Mountjoy, and confident of yet lowering his proud head, the young cadet checked the retort upon his lips and asked to be assigned to duty.

"Aid me here on the quarter-deck, to day, Mr. Dean," and Captain Delorme turned to have a closer look at the bold schooner that was so fearlessly offering him battle.

After ascending the rigging, glass in hand, and having a long gaze at the stranger, he returned to the deck, a quiet smile upon his face.

"Well, sir, what do you make of him?" asked Fred Lennox.

"She is a large schooner, with masts that rake most saucily, and can sail like a witch, while she should make a good fight, for she carries a heavy armament and has a crew of about seventy men."

"Then we need not fear a close fight, sir?"

"Oh no, for the fellow knows his vessel is fast, and is merely showing his bravado, to give us a look at him, that we may know he is again afloat, and under the pirate flag; he will run when we open on him."

As Captain Delorme spoke the schooner, that was bringing a fresh breeze down with her, suddenly luffed, and from her low and long dark hull, as she swung round, flashed gun after gun from bow to stern.

Aimed with remarkable precision, the iron shots came hurtling upon the brig, and then followed the crashing of timbers, the groans of wounded men, and the death-cry of some hard hit.

"Fire!"

The order came faintly, and from the lips of

Captain Delorme, and it was the last word he ever uttered, as he sunk dead in his tracks.

But the order was obeyed, and revenged the guns of the Sleuthhound spoke; but in the confusion they were badly aimed, for, when the smoke drifted away and order was restored, the schooner was seen flying away, apparently unhurt.

In vain was it that the iron dogs of the Sleuthhound barked viciously, and their thundering notes shook the sea; the fleet schooner sped away like the very wind itself, and even the swift-sailing brig was left far in her wake, with half a dozen of her crew dead and wounded upon her decks.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SEA CADET.

THOUGH Lieutenant Lennox, who commanded the Sleuthhound after the fall of Captain Delorme, ordered every stitch of canvas spread that would draw, he soon found it impossible to overhaul the fleet schooner, which, having struck her blow, seemed to feel content, and paid no more attention to her adversary.

Until nightfall, however, the chase was kept up, and then the brig was hove to, and preparations made to bury the dead captain and those of the crew who had fallen.

Impressively the service for the dead was read over them, and the brave seamen were launched beneath the waters to sink to their last resting-place upon the bottom of the sea.

Standing by with uncovered head, Roy Dean felt indeed that he was losing a true friend, when the hammock-wrapped and shot-weighted body glided rapidly from his sight, downward through the blue waves. That he had indeed lost a protector he was soon to find out, for, approaching him, Albert Mountjoy said, rudely:

"Your conscience should reproach you, Dean, for this day's work."

"And why, Mr. Mountjoy?"

"Well, you brought about this unfortunate affair, it seems, by coming to this vessel."

"I sought this vessel, sir, on account of severe persecutions at my home, in a great measure originating from a cruel letter of falsehoods, which you secretly sent to your father regarding me," and Roy Dean wheeled upon his accuser with fearless face and flashing eyes.

"Do you accuse me of trying to injure you, and writing about you what was untrue?" asked the midshipman, in a blustering tone, that brought around him all the members of his mess who were on deck.

"I accuse you of an ignominious attempt to ruin my character, by deliberately lying against me," was the response, in a calm and fearless manner.

"You shall retract those words, sir, I swear it," and Albert Mountjoy stepped nearer to the newly appointed cadet.

"I never retract language used to a liar and a coward, sir."

This speech rung forth in a way that not only told Albert Mountjoy that he had no ordinary personage to deal with, but also made known to the assembled midshipmen that the young fisherman had not come on board the Sleuthhound to be browbeaten with impunity, and they looked upon their leader to see what he intended to do in the matter, for, being the son of a wealthy planter and ex-naval captain, a powerful form and overbearing manner, added to a violent temper, Albert Mountjoy had gained a great influence over all of his messmates, while even his superior officers treated him with more respect on account of his family's great influence at Washington.

For one instant Albert Mountjoy seemed about to spring upon Roy Dean; but he wisely thought better of that, remembering as he did the young man's superior strength and activity, which he had often seen exerted in their boyhood days, and perhaps a wholesome respect for the quarter-deck, which he dared not disgrace; but he said in a voice that showed his suppressed rage:

"You shall answer for those words, Roy Dean, the first time we are ashore together, for I will waive your being a low-born fisherman and meet you."

"I hold a rank equal your own here, sir, and I am willing to meet you at any time or place you deem fit," and the young cadet turned on his heel and walked away, exceedingly sorry that his first day as a warrant officer in the navy of his country had begun so disagreeably.

After thinking the matter over, he determined to go to Lieutenant Lennox and tell him what had occurred, and also all that he had intended to make known to Captain Delorme regarding his leaving home, and the trouble he had gotten into.

But, as he approached the cabin, he saw down the companionway Albert Mountjoy in close conversation with Lieutenant Lennox, and heard the latter say:

"I am surprised, and I will keep a sharp watch on him, for his joining us just before the schooner appeared in sight has certainly a suspicious look."

With seeds of suspicion thus planted in the mind of the new commander of the brig, Roy Dean felt that he would be powerless to make an impression, and he kept his sorrows and secret in his own breast, determined to win the respect of his superiors by his devotion to duty and gallantry, should occasion offer.

But the friendless young cadet soon found that he had not an enviable position on board ship, for, while the superior officers regarded him with evident suspicion, his equals shunned him and treated him coldly, and even some of the crew had evidently been tampered with by the middies who were unfriendly to him.

Thus matters went on for months, and though he had won the name of a first-class sailor, ever most attentive to duty, Roy Dean had not a friend on board ship that he knew of, and passed most of his time, when not on duty, a voluntary look-out at the masthead.

"Ho the deck!" he called out one afternoon, in the ringing voice the crew all so well knew.

"Ay, ay," answered Fred Lennox, who was pacing the deck, a cigar between his teeth.

"A large schooner is running down the inlet beyond yonder island, and from her topmasts I think it must be the pirate craft we have been so long looking for."

All was excitement now, for the island was but half a league away, and the schooner could not be more than the same distance beyond it.

"Get her bearings and come to the deck," called out Lieutenant Lennox.

"Ay, ay, sir," and a moment after Roy stood on the quarter deck, saying, modestly:

"She is heading for the lower inlet to run out to sea, sir."

"Do you know these waters, Mr. Dean?"

"Not well, sir; some years ago, when quite a boy, I ran down here in a lugger with my father, and if I remember correctly there is good water in the lower inlet yonder, and barely ten feet in the upper pass at high tide."

"And in the inlet?"

"Plenty of depth everywhere."

"It is a league to the lower inlet from here, and you say the schooner is nearly opposite to us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we shall head her off, and run in after her, for as it is low tide now she cannot run out the upper pass; beat to quarters, Mr. Gray," and Lieutenant Lennox turned to his second officer, and with the men at the guns and a seven-knot breeze blowing, the brig dashed rapidly along, heading for the inlet.

"Go aloft, Mr. Dean, and see if the schooner still holds on, and then come down and take the helm, for I suppose you are willing?"

"For the lower inlet I will pilot, sir, but not for the upper, as I never ran through there," and Roy rapidly ascended to the maintop and glancing over the pine-covered island beheld the needle-like and raking topmasts of the schooner, devoid of canvas, standing steadily on her course, as when first discovered.

As he looked there came the deep boom of a gun, and suddenly out of the inlet shot a large lugger, under full sail, and evidently flying for safety.

"There's a lugger running out of the inlet, sir, and the schooner is in chase," called out Roy, and he descended once more to the deck, and at a motion from Fred Lennox took the wheel.

In the mean time the lugger had sighted the brig, and putting her helm down had headed for her, recognizing the flag at her peak.

As the craft approached it was evident that she was a trader at the hamlets and plantations along the coast, and in putting into some small village to dispose of her wares had run upon the schooner.

The wind, evidently blowing fresher out of the inlet, and the superior speed of the schooner caused her to reach the pass much sooner than the brig, for her sharp prow and long bowsprit were seen coming out beyond the land, while the Sleuthhound was yet half a mile distant.

But the keen eyes on board at once sighted the vessel-of-war, down went her helm, and, as if working on a pivot, the long hull swung round and darted back into the inlet, almost before a shot could be fired at her from the bow guns.

Crowding on sail the brig now flew down toward the pass, stretching away so as to get a good offing to enter, and thereby running in close proximity to the lugger, upon whose deck half a dozen men were visible.

"Ho! the lugger!" called out Lieutenant Lennox.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Do you know that schooner?"

"Yes, captain, it's the Nemesis, and Darke the pirate is her commander."

"You were right, Dean; you seem to know that vessel uncommonly well," remarked Fred Lennox. Roy felt that there was a sneer in the tone of his commander; but he made no reply, and the crew burst forth in a cheer at the opportunity to avenge the death of their commander, for they felt that they now had the pirate schooner in a tight place.

CHAPTER XXIV.
DENOUNCED.

SEEING that the brig was in hot chase of the schooner, the lugger's skipper put about, with the evident intention of seeing the fun, and also running back into the inlet to the little Spanish fishing hamlet known to be situated on a creek a league inland.

Having gained a point from which she could lay her course into the pass, Roy put his helm a-starboard and the brig dashed straight for the riverlike opening between the large island and the mainland.

But the schooner was not yet visible, for, hugging the shore as close as possible, he wished to avoid as long as he could the fire from the Sleuthhound, and having crowded every inch of canvas that would draw, the fleet craft was walking over the waters at a splendid rate of speed.

But once in the inlet and the schooner was discovered, and a cheer mingled with the roar of the bow-guns which sent their iron compliments after the pirate.

The first few shots fell wide of the mark, for the brig had not yet gotten fairly into the schooner's wake; but then the gunners got their aim regulated, and with a good target, they sent ball after ball into the rigging of the flying vessel.

At first the schooner did not reply, devoting every energy to escaping from her powerful and merciless foe; but, stung to resentment by the wounds to his vessel, and anxious, if possible, to disable his fleet pursuer, Captain Darke set his stern guns to work, and the brig came in for her share of damage, for the pirates proved themselves good shots.

And thus on the two vessels sped like the wind, giving and receiving blows that staggered, yet did not fatally wound them, though many a brave man sunk down to die upon the decks.

And through all, in spite of her tattered sails and splintered masts and spars, the pirate schooner was steadily gaining upon the brig, and heading for the upper pass, as if to attempt to run to sea.

From one inlet to the other was about two leagues, and during this chase the fierce stern and bow firing was kept up, but with far more damage to the schooner than the brig was evident, for the guns of the latter were of much heavier caliber than those of the pirate, and all on board both vessels looked momentarily to see the tall and rakish masts of the pursued vessel cut down by a square, raking shot.

But, luck protected the pirate captain, and at last he gained the entrance to the inlet leading out into open water.

"He is going to run through, Dean; I thought you said there was only ten feet of water at high tide."

"I did, sir, and the schooner draws about nine, and the tide is now on the flood."

"If you are right as to depth he cannot make it; but, how do you know the pirate draws nine feet?" and Lieutenant Lennox spoke as though suspicious of the cadet.

"I said about nine feet, sir, and I guess that from her build and rig."

"Ah! He runs along still as though there were plenty of water."

But, as the lieutenant spoke, the speed of the schooner was suddenly checked, and going slower and slower, she came to a stand-still, while a cheer, that reached the pirates' ears, broke from the brig's crew.

"Great God! she is afloat again," cried Lieutenant Gray, and a revolution of feeling went over every heart, from hope to despair.

It was true; a moment only had the schooner trembled on the bar, and then the stiff breeze and the rapidly-rising tide forced her ahead once more.

But again a yell came from the brig, for again the momentum of the pirate was checked, and entirely so.

"Now we have him!" called out Lieutenant Lennox.

"He is throwing his guns overboard, sir," said Roy Dean, and the heavy splashes were heard on the brig, as gun after gun went into the sea, until six had been thrown over, and once more, lightened by the loss of two-thirds her armament, the buccancer craft forged ahead, and with a speed that showed she had deep water under her keel.

"He has escaped! pour in your heaviest fire and sink him," cried Fred Lennox, and the bow guns opened more fiercely than ever, and sent a hail of iron after the flying freebooter.

"I can luff, sir, if you will give him a broadside," said Roy, quietly.

"And thereby lose our headway. Oh no, Cadet Dean."

"The brig cannot pass through the inlet, sir, and already we are shoaling rapidly," answered Roy, wounded deeply by the unkind tone of his commander.

"True; let her wear round, and stand by at the guns there, to give her a broadside!" came the order, and the brig reeled under the terrific roar and recoil of her guns, which hit the schooner hard, it was evident.

And on the other tack another broadside was

sent after the pirate, and when he was hurt, but still he held on, and the Sleuthhound was compelled to give up the chase, with many imprecations from officers and crew upon the heads of the buccaneers, for darkness was coming on, the brig was considerably cut up, and before she could run out of the lower inlet and get an offing, the Nemesis would be leagues at sea, or securely hidden in some retreat on the coast known to her daring captain.

As the brig dropped anchor to undergo repairs, the lugger, which had followed, asked permission to come on board, the skipper anxious to give the crew a treat for saving his vessel and cargo.

Fred Lennox readily granted permission, and the skipper and his men were soon mingling with the sailors of the Sleuthhound.

"Are you often chased by buccaneers?" asked Fred Lennox, of the skipper.

"Waal, we has some narrow pulls of it, but it was the highest one to-day, and I'd 'a' been overhauled afore we seen the brig ef it hadn't been for my mate here, Dave Tuttle, who says as how he knows a young officer aboard your vessel."

"Indeed; who is it, Mr. Tuttle?" and Fred Lennox turned to that worthy, or rather unworthy, who, on account of a scrape he had gotten into in B—, had taken to sea-life again, and being really a first-class seaman had been appointed first-mate of Captain Burns's trading lugger, appropriately named Necessity.

"It are Midshipman Mountjoy, sir, a most likely young gentleman."

"Indeed? and a favorite officer on board; Mr. Terry, ask Midshipman Mountjoy to come here."

The cadet addressed waited away to obey the order, just as Roy Dean approached, and saluting, said:

"There is a man from the lugger, sir, who says near the upper shore of the island, within a few fathoms of the beach, is a channel by which the brig could get to sea."

"And did you not know this, sir?" sternly asked the lieutenant.

"I did not, sir, nor did any one on the schooner seem to know of its existence, as she held midway of the inlet; the man who reports such a channel says he shipped on the lugger two days ago, and lives near here."

"Ah!"

"May I be so bold, sir, to ask if you hain't Roy Dean, disguised in a officer's uniform?" and the sinister face of Dave Tuttle confronted Roy Dean, who turned slightly pale, but answered:

"My name is Roy Dean, Dave Tuttle."

"And you know Cadet Dean, too?"

"Yes, capt'n; we comes from ther same anchorage, and I guess I'm considerable in pocket for finding this young gentleman, as *there's a reward of five thousand dollars for him*."

"What! do you mean this? Is there not some mistake?" cried the lieutenant, in surprise.

"I guess not, sir, for I has it here," and he took from his pocket a crumpled paper and handed it to Fred Lennox, who read aloud:

"NOTICE!!

"FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD!!

"Broke jail on the 17th inst.,

"ROY DEAN,

a condemned murderer, awaiting the execution of his sentence, on Friday, 23d inst.

"Any one capturing said Roy Dean, or giving information to lead to his capture will receive the above reward, and

"FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS

for the knowledge of each of the aiders and abettors in his escape.

"DESCRIPTION.

"Five feet ten inches in height; weight about 160 pounds; well-formed, broad shoulders, and very powerful and active; twenty or twenty-one years of age, black piercing eyes, dark waving brown hair and slight mustache; considered very handsome, and a dangerous youth to meddle with.

"In behalf of the citizens of B— and neighboring planters, and the discharge of my duty, I offer the above reward.

BEN HOLLIS,

"Constable."

"And so, sir, you are a murderer and fugitive from justice?" and Fred Lennox turned sternly upon Roy Dean, who had not moved a muscle during the reading of the notice that denounced him.

"Of such am I accused; I was tried and sentenced upon circumstantial evidence alone, and to clear my character I made my escape," was Roy's quiet answer.

"Ah, Dave, old fellow, glad to see you! An old fisherman friend, Lieutenant Lennox, and as honest a man as ever lived," said Albert Mountjoy, approaching.

"He makes grave charges, and proves them, against Cadet Dean."

"I overheard you read the placard, sir; whom did he kill, Dave?"

"Mark Mordaunt, sir."

"Ah! indeed! Poor, poor Mark; it was from jealousy, lieutenant, I know, as Mordaunt was a successful rival, sir; and, poor fellow, he was the only support and protector of his widowed mother and sister."

"And you have dared come on board this vessel, sir, accepting a cadetship? By Heaven! I will return you to the prison from which you escaped. Mr. Gray, put this man in irons, and confine him to his state-room."

Without a word, as white as though dead, but calm and firm in demeanor, Roy Dean again felt the iron shackles upon his wrists, and was led away a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXV.

TAKING THE CHANCES.

WHEN Fred Lennox learned from the seaman of the lugger that he could run him through the upper inlet, he hastily completed repairs on board, and engaged the man to act as pilot, the trading craft to follow and take him off, after they were once more in open waters.

Feeling that the pirate did not know of the channel, and that he would expect the brig to have to go round by the lower pass, Lieutenant Lennox had an idea that he might unexpectedly run upon the schooner, and all on board were most anxious to at least make the effort.

Having gotten the Sleuthhound under weigh, the seaman from the lugger at once stood inshore until within a ship's length, the lead showing five fathoms all the way.

Then with a fair wind he hugged the island, and as he had said the depth was good all along the shore, and only once did the channel shallow down to two fathoms, and then only for an instant.

"Well, sir, if you had been on board we would have caught the pirate," declared Lieutenant Lennox, when the brig hove to, to put the man back on his own craft, which had closely followed, and he handed the trader a purse of gold.

"May I have a berth on the brig, sir?" asked Dave Tuttle, who had remained on board the Sleuthhound.

"Yes, my man, if you care to give up your position as mate for that of common seaman in the navy."

"Thank you, captain; I'll do it, and you know I have a little sum coming to me when we gets the murderer ashore."

"Ah, yes; you are indeed entitled to the reward offered. Now go forward, and Lieutenant Gray will assign you to a watch," and Fred Lennox swept the horizon for the schooner; but nowhere upon the dark waters was there a sail visible, and the brig cruised off and on until morning, and then diligently searched every inlet along the shore, in the direction which it was believed the pirate had gone.

But three days' search along the coast resulted in no success, and the brig came to anchor one evening about two leagues off from the Smugglers' Island, hoping with the coming dawn to catch a glimpse of the raking masts above the tree-tops inshore.

Looking out of the port of his state-room, and from which he could see the green shores, when the anchor was let go, Roy Dean recognized the locality, and remembered his captivity among the smugglers, which was not worse even than his position on board the Sleuthhound, for now his ambition was blasted and his hopes dead, as he felt he would assuredly be hanged as soon as he was delivered into the clutches of the law once more.

As the shadows of night crept over the sea, shutting out the distant shores, eight bells was struck, and the steward came with his supper.

"Well, Burke, we are anchored off the Smugglers' Island, I see," he said to the negro.

"Yes, sah, two leagues from shore, sah; ther loot'nent thinks ther pirate skunner mout be lying inshore, and 'tends waitin' fer daylight, sah, to hunt him out."

"And then the brig heads for the lake shore to surrender me, I suppose?"

"Dat am a Gospil fact, sah; but it mout be that ther brig don't git you thar," and Burke looked cautiously around.

"How mean you, Burke?" asked Roy, noticing the secretive manner of the negro.

"Waal, sah, it am 'bout two leagues to ther island, and I seen you swim dat distance once when ther middies was all in swimmin' off Cedar Keys, and I gueses you kin do it ag'in; ef you didn't hold out, sah, it am more pleasant to die drowning dan hanging, I has heard folks say."

"Ah, Burke, you are tempting me sadly; but how am I to get away?" asked Roy, the desire to escape strong within him, for free once more, he still lived in hopes of clearing his name of the stains upon it.

"I'll tell you, sah: the guard am eating his supper now, and axed me to keep a look-out, though he said there wasn't no real use of it, and I kin pick ther locks on your irons, sir, as I was a locksmith in Boston, afore I took to ther sea. See here, sah," and almost in a moment's time he had unfastened the lock that clasped the irons around Roy's ankles, they only being chained to the floor, using a piece of wire with the skill of a burglar.

"Now, sah, we'll leave it so as to make believe it is locked, and here is a rope you kin twist through this bolt and let yourself down into the water, as soon as all is quiet, and the

tide will be going in soon. Good-by, Massa Dean," and wringing Roy's hand the noble negro disappeared out of the door before the young cadet could detain him.

Roy was deeply moved by his devotion, and, fearful that he might get into trouble by his kindness to him, he was about to call him back and refuse to accept his freedom, when he heard the guard approach.

"Well, Burke, how's the prisoner?"

"He's all thar, but Ise mighty sorry for a man as is gwine ter hab his neck stretched; he better be prayin' for fergiveness fer he sins."

"You are a terrible preacher, Burke; but I wonder if you ever practice?" asked the marine, with a laugh.

"Guess I does! I hain't a bad nigger; but, I hasn't got no time to talk now."

"Did any one come here while I was off?"

"Nobody's been 'round," and Burke disappeared, while the marine opened the door, glanced in at Roy, and closing it began to pace up and down, the monotonous and seemingly untiring walk of a sentinel on duty.

Two bells struck, indicating nine o'clock, and then Roy Dean determined to escape, or at least make a bold attempt.

Noiselessly slipping the shackles from his ankles, he took up the rope and passed it through the chain-bolt in the flooring, letting the ends fall gently down along the brig's side.

Then divesting himself of his shoes and jacket, he tied them in a bundle upon his back, and glanced out of the port.

The brig's stern was now swinging shoreward, proving that the tide was setting in. Above he could hear the tread of the officer of the deck, and voices of the middies in pleasant conversation.

Taking up a pen and piece of paper, by the dim light of the lamp below decks, he wrote as follows:

"FREDERICK LENNOX,

"Lieutenant Commanding

"American Brig-of-war, Sleuthhound:

"SIR:—Not from the fear of death do I now make my escape from this vessel, but because I hope to clear my name of the stains my enemies have cast upon it.

"If I die in the attempt to reach the shore, my end will be more honorable than hanging.

"If I succeed, you will again hear from

"ROY DEAN, the Sea Cadet."

Having written this he fearlessly lowered himself down into the dark waters, and sunk out of sight, deep down into the black flood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE SCENE.

WHEN Roy Dean arose from beneath the waters, he was a hundred feet away from the brig, and he felt that he had not been seen by any one on deck.

A little stiff at first, after his imprisonment, he soon warmed up to his work, and taking his bearings from the brig, he struck out for the island, though he could not discern the land in the darkness.

With a bold, strong stroke that had won for him many an aquatic race, he swam rapidly shoreward, fully confident that his strength would not give out, and that he would make the distance, if a cramp did not seize him, or, his escape having been discovered, boats were not sent after him.

"They will order out every boat, and burn blue lights so as to find me," he thought, and he glanced backward to where the brig was yet dimly visible riding upon the waters.

But, all was quiet on board, excepting the voice of Albert Mountjoy in song came floating across the waters.

At last the brig disappeared from sight, even the stern port lights fading from view, and the bold swimmer was alone upon the vast waters.

But, undaunted, he held on his way, with the same strong, steady stroke, until it became almost monotonous; yet he seemed not to be fatigued, and with his eyes fixed straight ahead, only now and then turning his head to see if he had been discovered, he kept on.

"Great God! I am discovered!"

The words came from his lips as though they would choke him, and his heart almost ceased to beat, for distinctly to his ears came the splash of oars.

Quietly he floated upon the waters, hoping almost against hope that the boat would pass him in the darkness, and louder and louder came the steady stroke of the oars.

"Are you right, coxswain?" suddenly asked a voice that sent a thrill through the swimmer.

"Yes, sir; the island lies yonder, not a league away."

"And that accursed brig lies not a league seaward. I tell you head more inshore."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and Roy Dean heard no more, for the boat, a barge with eight oarsmen, passed within twenty feet of him!

"That was the voice of Darke, the Pirate, and he is going to the island," and Roy Dean felt that he had a double danger now to face; but he again swam on, following in the wake of the boat, which, until it had changed its course upon nearing him, had been heading parallel with the island.

And on the swimmer I fell, leaning to see the dark outline of the island loom up before him, and fearing to see burning lights behind; one moment dreading that he had lost his way and the next feeling a weakness as though his strength was going from him.

But, nerving himself to mighty efforts, he struggled on, and at last the dark land loomed up before him, and he could hardly restrain the cry of joy that arose to his lips.

Nearer and nearer he drew, and more distinctly grew the outline, until at last he was but a cable's length away; but he was almost tired out, and only by the greatest efforts was he enabled to at last stretch forth his hands and grapple with the sand, as the surf threatened to carry him back into the sea.

Struggling to his feet he gained the higher bank, and then fell, thoroughly prostrated, upon the very spot which he had started from nearly a year before, to swim out to the very vessel from which he had just made his escape.

For a long time he rested, and then, putting on his shoes and jacket, he started to reconnoiter the island.

"There is but one place here on the seaside where a boat could land, and that is yonder," he said, nodding his head in the direction indicated, and rising he walked cautiously along until he came in sight of the spot.

"And there is the boat, and one man in it; Darke and the balance are on the island—ha! I have it, he has come for his treasure, and, my life for it, the schooner lies three leagues away in the Cedar Canal on Reef Island, and the brig might look for her a week and never find her. Now, to see what Darke and his men are up to."

So saying, he kept cautiously on through the pine thicket, until he ascended a steep ridge that broke off abruptly upon the land side of the island, overlooking a small vale.

The sound of low voices now reached his ears, and peering over he looked down upon a strange scene.

Half a dozen battle lanterns threw a weird glare over the spot, their light falling upon a score of graves, marked by rude head boards.

It was the little burying-ground of the island, where had been buried the smugglers who died or were killed in that outlaw retreat. Roy knew the place well, for there also had been placed the remains of those who fell in the attack in which he had led the crew of the *Sleuthbound*.

But, the presence of those lights there then were not to light up the burial of an outlaw comrade, for half a dozen men were busily at work despoiling a grave, at the head of which, with folded arms, stood the tall form of Darke, the Pirate.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GHOULS AT THE GRAVE.

WITH eager eyes Roy Dean watched the dark forms working by the glare of the battle lanterns, wondering why they were robbing the grave of its contents, like so many ghastly ghouls, and to his mind came the form of the woman he had seen on that island months before, dwelling in the cabin, not a quarter of a mile from that spot.

"Here, you lazy devils, do you intend to keep me here all night?" suddenly cried Darke, in his deep, stern tones, and looking at his watch, he added: "It is now past midnight."

As he spoke the shovel of the man struck an object in the grave that gave forth a hollow sound.

"Ha! You have struck the coffin at last, have you? Now, out with it in haste, or daylight will catch us ere we reach Reef Island, and you'll yet ornament the yard-arm of the brig."

This disagreeable threat at the fate in store for them caused the men to bend their energies to work with renewed spirit, and in a few moments a coffin was lifted from the grave.

"Now, burst it open, lads, and I'll load you down with pieces of the sacred relic," commanded the chief, with a sneer, and the lid of the coffin was pried off, when, by the light of a battle lantern Captain Darke swung over it, not a moldering human form was visible, but half a dozen strong leather bags or pouches.

"Shoulder them! Now go at once to the boat; I will follow."

The men obeyed, and with their moldy loads walked off in single file, each one taking up a lantern and extinguishing it before he departed.

"Leave this one to me," and the chief raised the lantern so as to read from a paper he held in his hand, while he muttered, in a tone distinctly audible to Roy, who was within fifteen paces of him:

"Ha! ha! how this will break her proud heart when she knows that I have been here by night, and taken my treasure, while its fair guardian slept. Well, let her heart break, for I am tired of her, and she has shown a dangerous nature the past year," and taking his sword he thrust it through the letter, for such it seemed, and driving the point into the earth at the head of the yawning grave, set the lantern beside it and turned to go.

"Hold! Conrad Darke!"

Even Roy gave a great start at the voice, scarce with passion, that rang out on the silence, and the pirate recoiled so quickly, that he barely escaped falling into the open grave.

"Great God! Celeste, is it you?" he cried, evidently more moved than he dared to show.

"Ha! ha! Conrad Darke, does the specter of the island startle even your bold, wicked heart?" she said, derisively, and coming out from the shadow of the thicket into the full glare of the light, Roy Dean beheld the same beautiful, sad-faced woman that he had seen at the cabin, in conversation with the old negress, Linda.

"Your unexpected presence startled me. I was just going over to the cabin to see you."

"In your vile heart you lie, Conrad Darke. No words from your false throat, for I heard your muttered words, when you believed the Specter of the Isle was not guarding her treasure."

"I saw you come in your boat, and believed you were coming for me, and my heart was, oh so glad, and I was about to rush down and greet you, when you told the man to wait in the boat until you returned with the treasure."

"Those words sent a chill to my heart, for I have been, oh, so wretched here, and now I am all alone, for poor old Linda sickened and died weeks ago, and with my small white hands, which you once so admired, I dug her grave and buried her. Now you have come, not to take me with you, but to leave me here, as you had hoped, to die—ay, left here by your own confession, a letter that would break my proud heart."

The man stood like a statue before his accuser, who, in her snowy-white robe, looked indeed like a phantom, standing as she was in the midst of the graves of the dead.

"No, Celeste, I will take you with me," he said, in a low, earnest tone, evidently dreading that the woman had been driven to madness by his conduct toward her.

"Me go with you? Ah, fool that you are, you do not know Celeste Grayson, for sooner would I live here alone, until my hair is as white as snow, and lie down and die from feeble old age, than trust myself with you."

"Oh, no, I will not go with you, but *you shall remain here!*"

As she spoke she drew a pistol quickly from beneath the folds of her robe, and thrusting it forward fired.

With a bitter imprecation the chief staggered backward, and then from his lips broke a derisive laugh, as he said:

"Your aim was true, Celeste, but the shirt of mail I wear saved me."

With the cry of a maddened beast rather than a human utterance, she snatched from her bosom a slender Spanish poniard, and sprung toward him.

But, blind with fury, she saw not the yawning grave, and down into its loathsome depths she sunk.

A cry of horror broke from the lips of Conrad Darke, and, turning quickly, he bounded away along the path taken by his men.

A moment Roy Dean, also horrified at the thrilling scene he had witnessed, waited, expecting to see the woman rise from the grave; but no white form appeared, and, becoming alarmed, he slipped down the steep bank, and peered into the dark tomb.

All was silent, and seizing the lantern he held it down so as to light the dismal depths.

There lay the form, silent and motionless, and, in its white robe, looking strangely like a shrouded corpse.

Letting himself down into the grave, he bent over and raised the woman in his strong arms, and then he saw that her right hand still grasped the hilt of the poniard, the blade of which was buried in her side, having been driven there in her fall!

"She is not dead, only fainted, and may yet live," he said, quickly, feeling that her pulse yet throbbed, and raising her at length out of the grave, he started through the pine thicket toward the cabin, his former residence on the island giving him a good knowledge of the locality of the lonely home of the beautiful exile.

It was a hard struggle, after his long swim, but he persevered, and at last pushed open the cabin door and entered.

A lamp burned upon the table, and placing the form upon the divan he set to work to use what means and skill were in his power to restore her.

Having had considerable experience in broken bones and flesh-wounds among the fishermen, he at once examined the knife-thrust, and to his delight found that the point, held by a feeble hand, had turned on a bone, and the blade had merely buried itself in the flesh, just under the arm; had it gone straight it would have been instantly fatal.

With restoratives, which a short search of the room revealed to him, he soon had the pleasure of seeing the dark, lustrous eyes open and gaze upon him.

"Who are you?" she asked, in a low and bewildered tone, at the same time looking around the cabin, and then at him with a steady gaze.

"I am your friend; I found you wounded and—"

"Ha! I remember; did he wound me?" and her eyes blazed.

"No, you fell and your knife wounded you, but fortunately only slightly, for the point glanced on the bone."

She shuddered, and placed her hand upon the wound, holding it there, as if to stop the steady flow of blood.

"And Conrad Darke, where is he?"

"He fled and left you at the grave."

Again she shuddered, and again asked:

"And who are you?"

"The bitter enemy of Conrad Darke, the pirate chief."

She grasped Roy's hand, unmindful of the stain on her arm, and said vehemently:

"Then we are friends, and—"

But she fell back again, faint from loss of blood, when Roy Dean at once, with considerable skill, dressed the wound, binding it up securely; then placing her comfortably upon the divan he again sought to restore her.

It seemed a hard task, but at last she became conscious once more, and, obeying Roy's injunction not to excite herself but to try and rest, she remained quiet, saying simply:

"Yes, I must not die, for I have to live and enjoy the revenge I shall have upon Conrad Darke, for I will yet see him swing at the yard-arm."

Without saying more she sunk into a sleep, which Roy felt would last some time; so he crept cautiously out of the cabin, and walked rapidly back to the little burying-ground.

All there remained as he had left it, and he hurried across to where the buccanier boat had been left; but it was gone.

Glancing out over the dark waters, he muttered:

"Dared I do so, I could go out to the brig, in that woman's boat, and pilot it to Reef Island and capture the schooner; but I fear I would be even then given up to Ben Hollis. No, no, I'll bide my time, for Conrad Darke and myself will yet meet again."

"But if the brig should make a landing here to-morrow and reach the island?"

"Bah! I forget that only the smugglers know of this one spot, where a boat can land on the sea side, and there is no pilot to run the brig through the inlet to make a landing on the other shore. Besides, they can see from the maintop that the schooner is not hidden by the island, and that is all they care for; but I'll come here at daylight, and watch the movements of the *Sleuthbound*," and thus deciding, he returned to the cabin.

The wounded woman still slept, and throwing himself into an easy-chair, he sought to find a few hours' rest, of which he was sadly in need.

He awoke with a start, to find the gray dawn dimly lighting the room, and the large eyes of the woman gazing curiously upon him.

Seeing that he observed her, she said:

"You were very kind to me last night, and I thank you from my heart."

"I deserve no thanks; but, tell me how you feel?"

"The wound is sore, but not dangerous I know; it will soon heal."

"Will you allow me to dress it for you again?" asked Roy, modestly.

"Yes, you are my physician now," she said, with a faint smile, and then she continued, as the youth, with the tender touch of a woman, relieved the ugly cut:

"Do you belong to Conrad Darke's vessel?"

"No, I am no pirate."

"Pardon me; you were a prisoner then, held for ransom, for you look like the son of some wealthy planter."

"Again you are wrong; I am a cadet in the United States Navy, but I was also a prisoner, and escaped last night from my vessel, which lies two leagues off this island, by swimming ashore."

"You are a daring youth; but, why should you be a prisoner, for you certainly have not the look of one who possessed an evil heart."

"Nor have I; but, I will tell you, for the first time I saw you, months ago, I felt that you were more sinned against than sinning, and I pitied you."

The woman started, and said, quickly:

"Where did you see me before last night?"

"Listen, and you shall hear all," and Roy Dean told the beautiful island exile the whole story of his life.

Without a word of interruption she listened to all he said, and then taking his hand, she said softly, while the tears filled her eyes:

"You, too, have had your sorrows, my poor boy; but, who was it that lived near B—that it was said you killed?"

"Mark Mordaunt, a young planter."

The woman gave a start at hearing the name, that caused her face to contract with pain; but she closed her eyes and remained silent, and Roy, who had noticed the start, arose and said:

"Try and rest again, while I see what the

brig is about, for if they land they may reach the island."

"Come back as soon as you find out her movements," said the woman, softly, and leaving the cabin Roy wended his way once more toward the sea look-out.

And his eyes fell upon the brig, standing in toward the inlet.

"I forgot that Dave Tuttle was on board," he muttered between his set teeth, and turning quickly he ran back toward the cabin, for he knew that within a couple of hours the Sleuthhounds would be beating the island for the escaped murderer—himself!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SECRET RETREAT.

UPON his return to the cabin, Roy found that Celeste Grayson, as she had called herself, had again sunk to sleep; but she awakened at his entrance, and he told her of the coming of the brig toward the inlet, adding:

"I had not anticipated any trouble from the Sleuthhound, forgetting the presence on board of Dave Tuttle, a man who, when a boy, learned these waters from coming here with my father. In about an hour and a half they will land upon the island."

"And within the hour we will be where they can never find us," assured the woman, and Roy looked at her in surprise, for he had not believed there was a place upon the island that diligent search would not discover.

"You will have to do the moving, for I am comparatively useless," she continued, and under her directions Roy made a large bundle of all the things she cared to take with her, and then filled a basket with provisions, with which the cabin was well stored.

Carrying these, while the woman followed slowly, they went through the timber to the bank of the small creek, where, it will be remembered, Roy had seen her leave her boat, the night he pursued her in his pirogue.

The white, stanch little sailboat, once the life-boat of a man-of-war, was lying against the bank; so, aiding his companion into the stern-sheets, and depositing his bundles, he raised the sail, and under her guidance stood along the curving shores.

A sail of half a mile brought them to where the land rose to quite a height, and presented the solid face of a cliff, over which fell a waterfall, from some generous springs in the hills above.

"Head for that waterfall, and hold steadily on," said the woman, quietly.

"But I will dash right against the cliff," answered Roy.

"I am your pilot; do as I say," she remarked, with a faint smile.

Roy did obey, and in a moment more the boat glided through the sheet of water, but, instead of striking against the cliff, as Roy had feared, floated quietly into a basin, surrounded on all sides by an overhanging rock roof.

"Well, this is a safe retreat," said Roy, with almost boyish enthusiasm.

"Yes, we are safe here, and can remain until our enemies leave the island, and we can, in the meantime, lay plans for our future action, for I devote my life from this day to seeking revenge upon Conrad Darke."

Until the shadows of night began to fall, they remained in the secret retreat; then Roy started out to reconnoiter, and climbing to the cliff top, obtained a fine view of sea and shore.

To his delight, he discovered the Sleuthhound far away over the waters, and felt that it was safe to return to the cabin, if the sailors had not destroyed it.

Returning to the retreat, he told his companion of the departure of the brig, and pushing the boat out of the water-cavern, he set sail for the creek, landing there just at dark, to discover that the boats which had been lying on the beach had all been destroyed.

"I fear your cabin has gone, too," said Roy.

"It matters not, for, as soon as I am able, we must leave here," she returned, indifferently, and shouldering his bundles Roy started off, followed by the woman.

"See! There is a light in the cabin," cried the woman, in a whisper, as they came near.

Instantly Roy dropped his bundle and basket, and drawing a pistol from the belt of arms his companion had given him, he crept cautiously forward, until he had gained the back window, from which he had beheld the scene between Celeste and the negress, Linda.

As he peered in his face grew white and stern, for two men met his gaze, one of them an evil-faced seaman of the Sleuthhound, and the other, the scoundrel, Dave Tuttle.

"It is a trap to catch me, or the occupant of this cabin, and the brig has not really gone, and there may be more upon the island," thought Roy, and he was about to return to his companion, and hasten with her back to the water-cavern, when a remark of the seaman arrested his attention.

"I tell yer, I'm glad yer tipped me the wink to desert and remain with yer, messmate, for I'm thinking there is gold to be found here."

"You are right, Bowline; there is something

to be found here, and I hain't superstitious, now, about the Specter of the Island, seein' as how I've found out where she lives, and it don't look like a ghostly habitation. I'm inclined to think the woman are crazy, or are playing ghost to skeer honest folks off from searching for treasures the smugglers left here."

"You is right, messmate, and we'll s'arch diligent until we find, and so carry out Scriptur' teachin'; but, wasn't the boys skeery about s'arching the island?"

"Yes, they was afraid o' the specter; but I squints around until I finds this cabin, and then says I—'Dave Tuttle, you remains here, and gets Bowline to desert with yer.'"

"You see there was no need of my cruisin' in the brig after the boy escaped, for I was jist going to git my reward."

"And you think he drowned, messmate?"

"Can't tell, Bowline, as he's like a cat regarding lives; it were a terrible swim to take, yet he might have made it, and I'd like to catch him, though he's a dangerous one to handle."

"Hold! you are my prisoners!"

The two men sprung to their feet in dire alarm as the unwelcome words broke upon their ears, and they beheld, standing in the doorway, the tall form of Roy Deau!

Seeing that it was but one, and that one a person worth five thousand dollars to capture, both Dave Tuttle and Bowline, with one impulse rushed toward him, grasping their knives from their belt.

Without a word Roy raised his pistol and turned it upon Dave Tuttle; but, through some sudden impulse, as a thought flashed like lightning through his mind, he changed his aim to Bowline, touched the trigger, and the seaman fell at his feet, shot through the brain, while a second weapon, held in the youth's left hand, peered full in the face of the other deserter.

"Don't shoot me, Roy; for the love of God, don't kill me!" cried the cowardly wretch, recoiling from the muzzle looking threateningly upon him.

"There is no reason I should spare your life, Dave Tuttle; but I do so to serve my own purpose. Lie down there on the floor till I bind you."

The trembling wretch stretched himself out upon the floor just as Celeste Grayson appeared in the doorway, a pistol in her hand.

"I feared you were in trouble," she said, anxiously.

"Oh, no, I was forced to kill that fellow, and this one I saved because I need him; his name is Dave Tuttle."

"Ah? and they came from the brig?"

"Yes, deserted to search this island for treasure. There is an open grave over yonder that this man can fill, and if you will give me rope to bind this prisoner, I will take this body over and bury it."

"I will do better," and, crossing to the other room, she soon returned with irons, which Roy quickly clasped upon the ankles and wrists of Dave Tuttle, after which he shouldered the dead Bowline and carrying him to the burying-ground, consigned him to the grave from which the treasure had been taken.

That the crew of the Sleuthhound had also avoided that spot was evident, for the battle lantern was still burning, and the sword, with the letter still wrapped around the blade, was where the pirate chief had left it.

Taking the letter from the blade, Roy glanced over its contents, and then thrust it into his pocket with a look upon his face as though he had made some strange discovery.

After throwing the earth in upon the dead seaman, he picked up the lantern and returned to the cabin, where Celeste Grayson had prepared supper, seemingly caring little for her wound.

After supper Roy handed the woman the letter he had taken from the sword-blade. She read it through while her face grew dark with passion.

After awhile she said, and in a tone that showed how deeply she was moved:

"Ah, Conrad Darke, it is well I doubted you of late, for that doubt has led me to gain the means to track you to the bitter end."

Then turning to Roy she continued:

"Young man, the treasure which you saw Conrad Darke remove was but one-half what he believed it to be, for months ago, with the aid of old Linda, I opened the grave, took half the gold and precious stones from the bags, and filled the space with old silver I had here in the cabin."

"My treasure now lies at the bottom of the water-cavern, and with it we shall follow Conrad Darke to his doom—ay, and trace every enemy that has sought to ruin you to the bitter end."

A gleam of joy passed over Roy's face, for now he felt that he was no longer moneyless and friendless, and he grasped the hand of the woman who had proven herself such a strong ally, and said, fervently:

"I pledge myself to the work before us," and, as he bent over Dave Tuttle to see that he was secure from escape, that individual did not half like the look that rested upon the stern, handsome face of the persecuted Sea Cadet.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MEXICAN SCHOONER.

LYING at anchor in the middle of what is now known as Mobile river, and in front of the city of that name, was a schooner of remarkably beautiful proportions and rakish rig.

Apparently of two hundred tons burden, her lofty masts, formed of single sticks, tapering like a needle, and long spars and booms, indicated a capacity for carrying canvas enough for a vessel double her size, while her sharp bows proved that she could be driven through the water at a tremendous rate of speed.

Upon her decks a dozen seamen were visible in white, blue-trimmed shirts and duck pants, while upon their heads they wore light tarpaulins.

Carrying a long eighteen, and a twenty-four pivot gun fore-and-aft, and four sixes to a broadside, she possessed a heavy armament for a vessel of her size and small crew visible; but, what she lacked in men was made up by the perfection of every part of her, and a certain look that proved, in a long range or close action, a storm or a chase, she could give a good account of the qualities she possessed.

Originally she had been built for a Mexican cruiser or revenue cutter, but, not having been paid for, her builder had refused to allow her to go to sea, and his injunction upon her was holding her in port, with the sailing crew on board, while her commander had returned to Mexico to secure the necessary funds for the payment.

Standing upon the pier, one pleasant afternoon, some weeks after the scenes related in the foregoing chapter, was a young man, evidently a seaman, gazing with admiration upon the beautiful vessel, and unmindful of two other persons who seemed attentively watching him.

One of these watchers was a well-to-do-looking personage, who seemed to relish the young sailor's admiration of the schooner; the other was a shy-looking lad of perhaps fifteen, who gazed upon the youth with an expression hard to fathom.

Approaching the admirer of the schooner, the elderly man said, bluntly:

"A pretty piece of naval architecture that, my fine fellow?"

"Yes, as beautiful a vessel as I ever looked upon; perfect, apparently, from bow to stern, and keel to truck," answered the youth, enthusiastically.

"And just as elegant in her cabin, and all her metal silver-plated, while she is furnished in a style that would enrapture a prince."

"You have been on board of her then?"

"I built her."

"Indeed! You are a shipbuilder then?" and the youth seemed more deeply interested.

"Yes, I am Adam Breed; but mayhap you are a stranger here and don't know me, so I'll tell you that I built that craft on the order of a wealthy Mexican miner, who wished to make it a present to his Government."

"He told me to spare no money to make her all that could be desired in every particular, and I did so, putting aboard of her the finest armament money would buy, even filling her magazines with ammunition."

"Now it seems, after the crew has been sent for her, the Mexican who gave me the order fails, and can't pay for her, and his agent has gone to see if the Government won't buy her; but Mexicans are slow about building a navy, and there has been nothing done yet about it, and my large outlay in money is cramping me."

"Would you sell her?" asked the youth, eagerly.

"I tell you, young man, that is what she was built for."

"Then I would like to buy her; what is your price?"

Adam Breed, the senior of the firm of Breed & Co., shipbuilders, looked upon the youth, in his neat but ordinary sea costume, with the air of a man who thought he was being trifled with, for there was anger in his eye; but, he changed his mind about flying into a temper, and, as though to quiz the youth, answered:

"Young man, that schooner, as she lies at anchor there, cost me nearly fifty thousand dollars."

"I will give you that sum, cash, for her," was the quiet reply, and seeing the builder remain silent, he added: "yes, I will make it fifty-five thousand."

It was surprise that had kept Adam Breed silent; but now he said, angrily:

"Young man, never make fun of gray hairs."

"I do not understand, sir; I offer you fifty thousand, yes, fifty-five thousand dollars cash for yonder vessel, the money to be paid you within the hour, and the schooner to be turned over to me to-night; here is a pledge to bind the bargain," and he handed him a purse heavy with gold.

"Done! I have gotten rid of the elephant I had on my hands. I live at 60 Government street, and you can come there and pay me," said the delighted builder.

"I will be prompt; but, there is one condition—you are not to let the purchase be known, except to the Mexican officer on board, and I am

to have the papers from you to carry me to sea to-night."

"It's a bargain: have you a crew?"

"A few men, and I will find more; but if you know of any who wish to cruise in a legitimate but dangerous service, I will engage them; now I will row on board and ask to have a look at the schooner."

"I will take you out, sir," and the lad, who had slyly approached unperceived, sprung forward.

"Hullo, my boy! You were eavesdropping," cried the young sailor, sternly, as Adam Breed walked away.

"Oh, no, sir, I did not intend to listen; I only wished to speak to you, and if you will only take me with you, I will be so glad, and work so hard for you."

Something in the lad's face recalled some one he had met before, and his entreating manner, and earnest, expressive eyes, caused him to decide at once in his favor.

"I will take you, if there is no one to say nay."

"There is no one, sir; I am an orphan and all alone in the world," and the eyes filled with tears, and the slender form trembled with the remembrance of some past grief.

"Very well, you shall go with me; now tell me your name?"

"Call me Skip, sir."

"A good name, as you seem very light of foot; now, put me on board that schooner, and, mind you, not a word about what you heard between myself and the old gentleman."

"I can keep a secret, sir; I have one of my own to keep," was the reassuring reply, and, five minutes after, the young sailor was admiring the beautiful vessel from her decks; and more, when the clock on the town watch-tower told midnight, the fleet schooner was flying down Mobile Bay under a cloud of canvas, and at her helm stood her new owner, a proud look upon his fine, fearless face, and a determination to dare some great danger shining forth from his dark, piercing eyes.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ROVER OF THE RIGOLETTES.

WILL the kind reader turn again with me to the scenes so long left unspoken of, and in his mind's eye revisit Magnolia Retreat, the home of Captain Mountjoy?

Upon the broad piazza, they will behold Ruby, grown more beautiful than ever, yet with an air of sadness that adds a look of maturity to her face, and proves that the years which have passed over her young head have not brought all sunshine.

As she sits thus in deep thought, for the fancy embroidery upon her lap remains untouched, her mind seems far away, and though the time is approaching when she must marry Hazel Dean, to whom she gave her promise more than a year before, her dreams are of another, one whom she is following with her heart in all his wanderings.

The charges against him of being an outlaw and a murderer she has never believed, and hard did she strive to rescue him from the death that threatened him; but unavailing was her every effort, so thorough was the espionage held over her by Captain Mountjoy and others.

At length, when he escaped—the one love of her life—her heart gave one great bound of joy, and she hoped for his safety, and feared his recapture, until the days went by and she knew he must be free.

And innocent, good-hearted Hazel told her who it was that befriended Roy, thinking it would give her pleasure; but in her heart were planted seeds of jealousy, for she knew, with a woman's intuitive knowledge, that love alone could have prompted the act of Mary Mordaunt, to save the life of the man who had been tried as her brother's murderer.

And when it was rumored that Mary Mordaunt and her mother had suddenly sold their beautiful home to a Jew banker, and gone away to live, none knew where, Ruby Mountjoy felt assured that she had followed Roy Dean, and perhaps had become his wife, for her devotion to him certainly claimed a reward.

But then, one day, a beautiful brig-of-war anchored off Magnolia Retreat, and Albert Mountjoy returned to his boyhood home, accompanied by Fred Lennox, and then the sorrowing maiden heard of poor Roy, and how he had, by the aid of some one on board the brig, escaped, all thought to die, for he had taken fearful chances for life.

A few days were spent at Magnolia Retreat, and then the Sleuthhound set sail once more upon her path of duty, Albert Mountjoy leaving his home with a curse upon his lips and bitterness and threats in his heart, for Ruby Mountjoy had refused his proffered love in tones that meant no reconsideration of the matter.

"She loves that murderer and outlaw; but, if he be still alive she shall never marry him," was the threat of the young officer, as the brig sailed toward the Gulf, and left his native shores sinking from sight in the dim distance astern.

And thus had the days passed into weeks, until startling rumors were afloat of a dangerous vessel cruising in the Gulf and committing piracies.

And, still more, rumors came of high handed outrages committed on sea and shore, and though the Sleuthhound, a cutter and sloop-of-war were in constant pursuit of this terrible buccaneer, he evaded all attempts to capture him.

That it was the old foe of the coast, Darke, turned into a pirate, all knew, and most anxious were the naval officers to run down the daring chief who had at times daily tried his strength with their cruisers, and either whipped them off or escaped them.

And then, another surprising rumor spread like wildfire along the Gulf and lake shores, to the effect that another vessel, the very counterpart of the Nemesis, the pirate vessel, had been seen in the Rigoletts, apparently lying in wait for a foe or a prize.

At first this strange vessel was supposed to be an English privateer, for the threatening war-cloud of 1812, between England and America was just bursting upon the land; but, when the brig-of-war Sleuthhound, hearing of the stranger's presence in the Rigoletts, stood down toward her, the mysterious schooner took to flight, and, refusing to return the American's fire, sailed away with the speed of the wind, it was evident that the craft could not be an Englishman.

A pirate it must be; perhaps a twin schooner under one of Darke's lieutenants, was the universal opinion, until, one night of storm, when the sea was lashed to fury, and the glare of the lightning made the waters appear as on fire, the thunder of guns brought fishermen and planters to their doors, and off upon the wild waters all beheld two vessels in fierce combat.

One of these had the black flag of the corsair flying above its decks; the other was fighting under no flag.

One was the well-known schooner of Darke the Pirate; the other was its twin, the strange and mysterious schooner!

With eager eyes the dwellers on the coast watched this savage battle, saw each vessel give and receive wounds, beheld the bright flashes of their guns, which commingling with the lightning's glare lit up their decks filled with fighting men, heard the roar of the artillery, joining their brazen notes with the thunders of heaven, and were more mystified than ever regarding the strange craft.

Then, as the two vessels drew nearer together in the hot contest for mastery, unmindful of the storm, the lookers-on saw two large cruisers come in sight, bearing down upon the combatants.

One was an American sloop-of-war the other the Sleuthhound, and they both singled out one of the schooners.

But, with deadlier foes in view the firing on the schooners ceased, and spreading their huge wings of canvas they flew away over the wind-swept waves, each one close pressed by a cruiser, that poured a hot fire after the flying craft ahead.

And viciously did Darke return that fire upon the brig, which had singled him out; but the stranger schooner, flagless and silent, bounded through the waves, receiving yet returning no shot, to the surprise of every one who beheld her strange course.

And more rumors still came of how vessels, captured under the English flag, by this mysterious schooner, that had its rendezvous at the Rigoletts, were run into port, either Pensacola or Mobile, by night, and placed under the charge of the commandant, the officer in delivering up the craft answering no questions, and merely saying that the prize had been taken by the Rover of the Rigoletts.

And who is this daring Rover of the Rigoletts, that captures English vessels and turns them over to the United States authorities, makes war on British privateers wherever they can be found, hunts down the Pirates of the Gulf, runs from every American cruiser, large or small, never returning a shot fired at him from a deck over which the "stars and stripes" float, and yet carries no ensign, and cruises upon a flagless deck, giving as his name one that might serve for a buccaneer?

Such were the questions asked along the entire Gulf shores, in the cities, upon the decks of American vessels-of-war, and even by the pirates themselves.

But no answer came, and the mysterious schooner, and the Rover of the Rigoletts, remained as great a mystery as ever; some even asserting with superstitious awe, that the strange craft was a havenless cruiser, commanded by phantom seamen.

And, as Ruby Mountjoy sat that day upon her piazza, looking far out over the waters, her eyes caught sight of a distant sail.

Rapidly it rose above the horizon, and in its wake came another sail.

Eagerly watching, the maiden, whose residence upon the Gulf shores had taught her much regarding vessels of all descriptions, saw that the foremost vessel was a schooner, carrying above her low decks clouds of canvas, and

yet holding her own against her pursuer, a fine brig, without setting her topsails, though the vessel in her wake was crowded with all sail that she could carry.

Nearer and nearer they came, the brig apparently gaining, for suddenly a white puff of smoke burst from her bows, and then followed the deep boom of a heavy gun, while, with her glass, which Ruby had called to a servant to bring her, she saw the shot strike the water and ricochet over the schooner.

Just then a horseman rode up, and dismounting, approached the maiden, saying in a bright, pleasant way:

"And so you are watching the chase, Ruby?"

The maiden had been looking through the glass and had not observed his coming, for she started and changed color; but she answered:

"Yes, Hazel, and I am glad you have come; take my glass and see if that brig is not the Sleuthhound, please."

Hazel Dean, the same honest-faced, manly fellow as ever, took the glass, and, leveling it at the brig, said quickly:

"Yes, it is the Sleuthhound, and she is chasing the Rover of the Rigoletts."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DEATH CROSSES THE THRESHOLD OF MAGNOLIA RETREAT.

WHEN Hazel Dean gave utterance to the startling information that the schooner was the far-famed Rover of the Rigoletts, Ruby Mountjoy sprung to her feet with surprise, and said, anxiously:

"Are you sure, Hazel?"

"Perfectly; I have seen the craft a score of times cruising around the Rigoletts, and she once passed within a cable's length of me when I was fishing, and, anxious to get a closer view of the mysterious vessel, I hailed and asked if they wanted some fish; but, though half a hundred men were upon her decks, and an officer leaned over the taffrail, eying me through his glass, no answer was returned. Yes, that is the Rover, and he sails like a witch—By Neptune, but that shot from the brig did some damage aboard, and the schooner is going to get out of range."

"Can she, Hazel?"

"Yes, she can sail with the wind, and I am half-inclined to be superstitious enough to believe that there is something weird about the craft. See how she spreads her topsails and shakes that reef out of her huge mainsail."

"And up goes her flying-jib! Just look, Hazel, and see how she drops the brig now!"

"She does, indeed, and her commander knows his business; but I wish I could solve the mystery of his receiving the fire of American vessels and never returning it."

"It seems cowardly, Hazel, in Captain Lennox to fire upon a vessel that won't return it."

"Yes, but I have no respect for the men on yonder brig; for, after their treatment of poor Roy, they would do anything, and I would be glad to see the schooner turn on the brig and whip her, for, from all accounts of the way the Rover has captured English privateers twice his size, he could handle the Sleuthhound."

"Why, Hazel, you are losing your patriotism; and besides, Albert is on the brig."

"That fact is certainly enough to condemn it," responded Hazel, with as much sarcasm as he was ever guilty of.

Ruby made no reply, and the two looked eagerly at the chase, the brig now firing swiftly, but without effect, as the schooner was dropping her rapidly, and, having changed her course was running up the coast, as though to seek shelter among the islands visible in the distance.

Finding that the schooner was too fleet for her, the brig fired a broadside after her, and then headed landward, as though to anchor.

"Hazel, I see the deck of the schooner plainly now; there are four officers on the quarter-deck, one of whom has a glass to his eye, and is looking this way; forward there are some sixty men, and no one seems concerned at the danger they were in."

As though not having heard her, Hazel turned suddenly and said:

"Ruby, you said just now that I was losing my patriotism, and I will say frankly I have come over to tell you two things: first, I have determined to prove my patriotism by going to sea."

"What, Hazel?"

"Yes, I am going to sea in a privateer, now fitting out in Mobile, and of which I am to be captain, father having purchased one-third of her, and Judge Hayes another third, while the balance is owned by half a dozen fishermen at the hamlet."

"Ah, Hazel, what a life of danger you will lead!" exclaimed Ruby, with real feeling, for she dearly loved Hazel Dean, though not as a woman should love the man she was to marry.

"The same dangers only, Ruby, that our brave men in the navy and army face. In ten days we sail, and day after to-morrow I leave home in the lugger for Mobile, carrying my crew with me; and, oh, Ruby, my darling, if

you would only consent to become my wife before."

He paused, for she became deadly pale; but, with a mighty effort, she rallied, and, looking him squarely in the face, she answered:

"Hazel, I gave you my promise a year and a half ago to become your wife, and I will keep my word."

"Bless you, darling, and I will wait and speak to Captain Mountjoy about it."

"He has gone to town, but will soon return," remarked Ruby, absently.

"And if he refuses?"

"He has been as a kind father to me, Hazel; but I am my own mistress and shall keep my word, come what may."

Hazel, poor innocent man that he was of the ways of women, little dreamed that Ruby was giving him her heart with the grave of another love, the image of another than him, within it, and he was happy.

After a while he said:

"And I have news for you, Ruby; a strange circumstance I learned when in Mobile some days ago looking after my schooner; it refers to Roy."

With a start, and a flush on the face that would have betrayed her secret to any other man, Ruby wheeled upon him, crying:

"Oh, Hazel! have you news of Roy?"

"Listen, and I will tell you, although it will do him no good, for I have not your hope, Ruby, that he still lives."

"Hazel, I am firmly convinced that Roy Dean yet lives; I cannot, I will not, believe him dead."

"I hope you may be right, Ruby, for when in Mobile I discovered his parents—at least who they are."

"Oh, tell me all you know," cried Ruby, pleadingly.

"Well, I was appointed a guard over some prisoners, captured on an English sloop-of-war, and the captain I found to be such a noble gentleman, that I did all I could for him. In conversation he learned that I lived on the Gulf coast, and told me of a brother he lost there years ago; one word leading to another, I learned from him that the very vessel I saved you and Roy from, was the one upon which his brother and his son were passengers."

"Furthermore, he told me that his brother was a nobleman of wealth and high rank, and that, as he and his son had been lost, the estates and title fell to him, and, by inheritance, he had become Sir Roy Marmaduke."

"Yes, the name was Roy Marmaduke," repeated Ruby, trying to recall the past.

"I then told him of the wreck, and how I had saved you and Roy, and gave him the name of the vessel, with description of other things I had picked up upon the beach, and he was convinced that Roy was his nephew, especially when I spoke about the miniature he always wore about his neck, and which he said was a likeness of his mother; Sir Roy also told me, in the last letter he had received from his brother, written from Queenstown, where the clipper ship touched after leaving Liverpool, reference had been made to a wealthy New Yorker, who, with his little daughter Ruby, were passengers on the vessel, and that where he had formed quite a friendship with the American, the little Ruby had become devoted to the little girl; so, you see, there could be no doubt in the nobleman's mind regarding our Roy being indeed his nephew, and he bemoaned his sad fate, for I told him all, Ruby; and I will tell you a secret if you will keep it."

"Of course, anything you tell me, Hazel, shall be inviolate; but, just to think of Roy being a nobleman!"

"Poor boy, and not to live to know who he really was, for, after that night of storm he seemed to forget his early boyhood, and seemed to care only to live with the humble fishermen-farmers; but the secret, Ruby, is that I aided the English officer to escape, and he is going to sea in my vessel, and I shall land him at Nassau, for I do this for Roy's sake."

"Ah, Hazel, what a great big heart you have."

"It is all your own, Ruby; but see, the brig has dropped anchor, and a boat is coming ashore."

Ruby turned her glass upon the boat, and said:

"Yes, Albert Mountjoy and Captain Lennox are in it; but see how rapidly that party come up the road," and turning, she pointed to a carriage and several horsemen coming swiftly along the highway.

"It is the Retreat carriage, and on horseback are Raleigh Reid and Ned Hayes, who go with me as junior officers."

But Ruby did not hear his last words, for the carriage had wheeled into the grand gateway, and she arose, a great dread of evil at her heart.

A moment more and the vehicle drew up before the door, and Captain Ethan Mountjoy was taken out a corpse!

"He was shot by Wilber Otey, in a quarrel; but, thank Heaven, his murderer did not escape, for he resisted capture with knife in hand, and I did my duty—there will be two funerals,"

said Ben Hollis, who got out of the vehicle, supporting in his arms the body of Captain Mountjoy.

One staring look at the upturned white face of her adopted father, and Ruby fell unconscious into the arms of Hazel Dean, just as Albert Mountjoy and Captain Lennox reached the spot, to start back in horror at the scene that met their gaze.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PLEDGE KEPT.

It was the day after the murder—for it was nothing more—of Captain Ethan Mountjoy by Wilber Otey, and Hazel Dean sat on the little porch of his pleasant home, lost in deep thought, and looking down the vale to the blue waters beyond, where he was to seek a name for himself as the commander of a privateer.

Hearing the approach of a horse at a gallop he looked up, to behold a horsewoman, dressed in black riding-habit, and wearing a veil of the same somber hue.

It recalled the coming of Mary Mordaunt to him more than a year before, and he wondered if the lady intended to stop at the cabin.

His curiosity on that score was soon over, for the horsewoman drew rein, and a voice he well knew called to him:

"Hazel, please put my horse out of sight," and springing to the ground she ran into the house, while Hazel promptly obeyed her request and then followed her.

"Ruby, you here, and to-day?"

"Hazel, I made you a pledge, and I have come to keep it."

Ruby was very pale, and her eyes showed traces of weeping; but she was firm and calm.

"But, Ruby, when I asked you to be my wife yesterday, it was before the death of Captain Mountjoy. Knowing your sorrow, did you think I would have forced my presence upon you?"

"No, Hazel; for that reason I came, for I knew your heart was set upon making me your wife; hence, unknown to any one, I have come; must I entreat?"

She smiled faintly, and Hazel drew her to him gently, for his manners were like a woman's, notwithstanding his size and strength.

"I will send for the padre; he will be here within the hour, and then, Ruby, you will be Mrs. Hazel Dean," and he laughed right out in his great joy, and left the room to send the farm-hand after the priest.

Until the arrival of that personage, most important in matters matrimonial, Hazel Dean sat and talked to Ruby about the future, and how he intended to make a great name for her to wear, and win a fortune, with which to buy her an elegant home.

Ruby listened so passively that Hazel deemed it her grief that prevented her showing more enthusiasm, and said:

"Your father will be buried to-morrow, Ruby, and I am sorry I will not be at the funeral."

"He will be buried at five, Hazel, and, as you will not sail before eight, I wish you to be there to go with me!"

"But Albert?"

"I care not for him, and shall tell him frankly to-night that I am your wife; and more, after the funeral, I shall return with you to this place, for your father will need me here when you are gone, for he is getting old now, Hazel."

"Yes, he has turned seventy; but he is hale and hearty; why, I am an old man compared to you, Ruby, and I have wondered you did not love Roy, or Albert, or some of those handsome young planters."

She shuddered when he spoke of Roy, but said, quickly:

"As for Albert Mountjoy I do not believe him to be a true man; nay, whenever I am with him, in spite of his good looks and money, his rapid promotion and pleasant manner, I always have the same feeling that I had once when I sat watching the writhings of a snake."

"And what will he do, now that his father is dead and he has lost you?"

"Return to sea and shut the Retreat up, leaving it to the charge of the overseer; but, I do not care what he does, so he avoids me."

"I believe you hate him, Ruby."

"I do."

Before more could be said Commodore Dean entered, and in a few words Hazel explained the position of affairs to him, and the old man was nearly beside himself with joy.

"I lost Roy, whom I loved as my own; to-morrow I give Hazel up, and if you come to cheer my home then can I live without every atom of joy being taken from me."

"Time was, Ruby, when I held my own with the best in the land, for I was an officer in the British navy; but I insulted my superior by giving him advice which he sadly needed, and I resigned from the service; and, adversity following, I came to America and made it my home; but this boy was born in Dean Castle, England, and he is of good blood although our pockets are threadbare; but, what care I for riches now, when you, Ruby, will be my daughter, Hazel's wife?"

The old Commodore seemed deeply moved,

and Ruby, too, felt that if she was marrying a man she did not love, he was one whose heart was true, and she could trust him through all.

A few moments more and the padre arrived, and with Raleigh Reid, who just then rode up, as a witness, the ceremony was performed that made Ruby May—her own name—Mountjoy the wife of Hazel Dean.

A glass of rare old wine from the Commodore's secret store, a few toasts of a quiet kind, and Ruby Dean was lifted into the saddle by her husband, and, drawing her veil over her face, she started upon her return for Magnolia Retreat.

"Hazel, I wish to speak with you," said Raleigh Reid, as Ruby rode away.

Together they walked down to the beach, leaving the padre to be entertained by the Commodore, over several glasses of the rare old wine, which the worthy priest had christened "Nectar for the gods," and for some time neither Hazel nor Raleigh spoke. At last the latter said:

"Hazel, you know I have always been a ne'er-do-well-sort of a fellow, and I have only myself to blame for it; but, now you have given me a start, and my parents have hopes of me, especially as I have dropped gambling and ceased being a drunkard, since that night I helped poor Roy off; there is one thing I wish to ask you on honor, and I hope you will answer it."

"I certainly will, Raleigh; out with it."

"Well, did you ever think that Roy cared for Mary Mordaunt more than as a friend?"

"No, indeed! He liked her immensely, and who could help it? I wish I knew where she was now, for her mother is dead, you know, and she must be poor."

"I would so like to find her, too; but one more question: did she love Roy?"

"Now, there's another case; who could help it, excepting those who were jealous of him and who wished to work his ruin?"

"True; but, answer the question."

"No, I know she could not have done so; frankly speaking, I always thought she loved you, Raleigh."

"I had hoped so; but my wild acts separated us."

"Why did you ask if she loved Roy?"

"I'll tell you all that I care to make known: she risked much to save him from the gallows; after his escape she suddenly left her home, and I think I saw her in Mobile last week and with Roy Dean!"

"Impossible!" cried the now thoroughly excited Hazel; "impossible, for I am confident that Roy is dead."

"I do not believe it, and I will tell you why, though I intended keeping it to myself."

"You sent me to Mobile to attend to some work for you about the privateer, and I went to the theater, and while there three persons entered a box; three gentlemen, apparently, dressed as naval officers."

"One was the picture of Roy, and in full uniform; the others were also in naval attire, but one was a mere youth it seemed, and the other had a baggish but handsome face that defied detection as to age, for at one time I thought him thirty-five, and another twenty."

They sat through the play, left the theater quietly, and I followed them down to the river where a six-oared boat awaited them, and they rowed out of sight down toward the bay."

"Well, Raleigh, it was but a fancied resemblance."

"So you think, my dear captain, but not I; listen while I tell you all."

"The following morning I learned how the Rover of the Rigoletts had entered the harbor at night, passing the forts early in the evening, with two English prizes in tow, and that an officer from that noted craft had turned the captured vessels over to the captain of the harbor police, and Adam Breed, who you remember built your privateer, saw the schooner of the noted rover, and says he built it, and that the young man who delivered the British vessels over to the authorities he recognized in a box at the theater to-night. Now does not all this look suspicious?"

"If you think Roy was the one you saw at the theater, yes; but, now about Mary Mordaunt being seen with him?" answered Hazel.

"Well, of that I will not now speak, Hazel, for I may wrong her; but, one thing I will tell you, and that is—I believe Roy Dean to be on board this mysterious craft known as the Rover of the Rigoletts."

"And why?"

"From what I heard and saw in Mobile."

"Ah, Raleigh, I wish it was as you think, but I fear not, for I have looked upon Roy as dead ever since he attempted that two league swim from the Sleuthhound to Smuggler's Island."

"You give me little consolation, and yet you do, for I would rather have it as you say it is; but I will not detain you, and I have considerable to do before I leave."

Hazel held out his hand and Raleigh grasped it warmly, and then added:

"I cannot help it, Hazel, but I believe Roy Dean to be on that mysterious schooner."

A few moments more and Raleigh Reid was riding rapidly homeward, while Hazel Dean sat upon the little pier and dreamed the happy hours away, for had he not, an hour before, made Ruby, the one woman of the world whom he could love, his wife?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FACE TO FACE.

By the side of his forefathers Captain Ethan Mountjoy was laid to rest, and over his open grave the marines of the Sleuthhound fired a salute to the dead ex-officer, while a large concourse of people from far and near and a hundred seaman from the brig followed him to his last resting-place on earth.

And Albert Mountjoy, though he stood with bowed head looking down upon the coffin that held the remains of his father, had upon his brow a scowl, for not upon his but upon Hazel's arm leant poor Ruby, sorrowing deeply over the loss of one who had been to her all that a father could be.

But Albert Mountjoy had heard from her lips that he was not to be her guardian—that from that day she would leave Magnolia Retreat and seek shelter beneath the humble roof of her husband; and the young lieutenant, for he had rapidly walked up the ladder of promotion, had cursed her for a fool, and swore revenge against her for having turned from him to one such as was Hazel Dean.

With a proud, defiant smile she had listened, and, unable to constrain her into obeying him, she had gone with her husband to the grave, and, returning, had been driven back with him to Hazel's home, bidding Albert Mountjoy, as she hoped, an eternal farewell.

Cursing his bitter disappointment, and feeling that all who knew of it would consider him a laughing-stock among men, Albert Mountjoy was only too willing to hasten away from the Retreat, and while the sun had yet a long way to travel to its setting the Sleuthhound sailed away, with one man upon her decks who was breathing the bitterest anathemas upon the shores he was leaving.

And Hazel, having taken his beautiful bride to his home, hastened to get all in readiness for his instant departure, for his lugger was riding uneasily at anchor, and the crew who were to accompany him had already arrived, and were in readiness to take the first step in the perilous life before them.

At last, as the sun neared the western horizon, all was in readiness for the start; Hazel Dean bade his young bride farewell and sprung on board his lugger, giving his orders to the crew in a voice that trembled with emotion.

Upon the pier, watching the departure of their kindred and friends, were a number of the people from the hamlet; but, as the lugger drew further away, one by one they returned to their homes until only two remained.

Those two were Commodore Dean, his face pale and his eyes burning with unshed tears, and Ruby, the bride of a day, the bride of a man to whom she had pledged herself while her heart held the grave of another love.

"Come, my child, let us return."

"Not yet, father, can I go; but you return and I will soon come; the sail is still in sight."

"She loves the boy dearly, and no wonder," said the old man, and he left her to her grief alone.

Slowly the shadows stole over the waters, and at last twilight died away and darkness came; still Ruby lingered, not watching the boat that had gone, but dreaming over the past.

At length the moon rose from out the sea, silencing the restless waters and throwing its light full upon her, as like a statue she stood gazing upon the beauty of the scene yet seeing it not.

Suddenly a footstep aroused her, for it was close at hand; she upbraided herself for remaining so long, believing it was the Commodore who had returned for her.

But, the one whose step had aroused her seemed also to start back at sight of her, and thus, staring into each other's face, those two met again—Ruby and Roy!

"Ruby!"

"Roy!"

Those two names were spoken, and yet, though the man was believed dead, the woman started not at sight of him.

She stood in the full light, he half in the shadow of the forest behind him. Neither spoke, for each heart seemed too full to utter one word.

And thus a painful silence ensued, until Ruby, first gaining her self-control, said, softly:

"Roy, I knew you would come back."

"Yes, Ruby, I have come home; but I am no longer the boy you thought me when last we met. I am a man, who has had more than a man's sorrows, and suffered more than tongue can ever tell."

"From my heart I pity you, Roy."

It was all she could say, though she felt a thousand times more.

"Pity me, yes; and that is all," he said, bitterly.

"How mean you, Roy?" she said, not knowing how to answer.

"I mean that I find you here, Ruby, and that this must be your home."

"Yes, from to-day."

"To-day; Great God! do you mean it that you came here to dwell only from to-day?"

"Yes; I will tell you all, for I owe it to you, Roy, my brother."

"Brother!" and the word rung disagreeably from his lips.

"Yes, so I called you; so you must be, for, not two hours ago my husband left me here, while he went to serve his country."

"Your husband," came in the same ringing tone of sarcasm.

"Yes, Hazel Dean; my husband since yesterday afternoon."

"He came to me then and reminded me of my pledge, and I promised him again to become his wife, as he was going away."

"But, alas, just then Captain Mountjoy was brought home dead—"

"Dead!"

"Yes, cruelly slain by Wilber Otey."

"And Wilber Otey?"

"Was killed by Constable Hollis in resisting arrest."

"Go on."

"My adopted father being dead Hazel came not to claim me, so I came to him and we were married in yonder cottage up the vale, I to return to Magnolia Retreat."

"To-day my father was consigned to his grave, and I returned home with Hazel, who sailed, as I told you, two hours since; now you know all, Roy."

"No, I do not know all! Do you love your husband?"

"How dare you ask me that question, Roy Dean?"

"I dare ask it, Ruby, and I await an answer."

She walked from him a few steps, and then returning faced him, looking straight into his eyes.

"You have asked me a question which no wife should answer; but I will answer you, Roy Dean. Do I love my husband, you would know! Ah me, I would to God I did!"

"But, my heart cannot crush you from it, be you what you may, and what 'twas whispered this night you are."

"Do I love Hazel Dean when his touch falls coldly upon me and the remembrance of you thrills my being as though hot lead flowed through my veins?"

"Do I love Hazel Dean when his voice is as the coo of the dove in my ears, and your tones cause my heart to throb as though it would burst?"

"Do I love my husband when I long to lay my head upon your breast and die?"

"Oh, yes, Roy Dean, I love my grand, noble-hearted husband, but it is not as I love you; but I have within me a heart that shall be true to him, though the hell of temptation, covered with beautiful and fragrant flowers, to hide its despair, yawn beneath my feet."

"Now, Roy Dean, be you what you are, even pirate, as men say, you have your answer."

Roy Dean had listened to the passionate flow of language deeply moved, though his face was outwardly calm, yet white and stern.

At last he spoke, and in a tone low, earnest and distinct:

"Ruby, you have proven yourself the true woman I ever believed you to be, and you are the wife of a man whom, rather than cause one instant's sorrow, I would die the death upon the gallows that still hangs over me."

"I came back here, with a heart-longing to once more stand upon this shore—with a desire to see Hazel, and that dear old man I call father, even though I uttered no word, and they saw me not."

"I came back here to see you once more, be you wife of whom you might be, or sweet little Ruby, as I left you in the past."

"I have had my heart's desire and I go away forever from you, and from those I love; but one of these days you shall hear that I am not the evil being men call me, and that my name shall not sink into an unknown grave."

"Ruby, do not speak of my presence here, and when men call me vile, do not believe them. Ruby, farewell!"

He dragged her to him with a sudden, impassioned impulse, pressed burning kisses upon her lips, and left her alone, standing like a statue in the moonlight; and thus old Daniel Dean found her, when, in alarm at her long absence, he sought her.

"Poor child, your love for Hazel has turned your brain," and he led her, like a docile child, back to the cabin, hastening his steps, as a wild, unearthly shriek rung out in the forest—a cry as of a soul, lost forever, about to plunge into the bottomless pit of hell.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LETTER.

"A LETTER for you, Commodore, and one for the missus, God bless her sweet soul!"

It was old Jake, the fisherman, once the mess-mate of poor old Sandy Benson, who spoke, and he handed Daniel Dean a letter, and an

other to Ruby, having just returned from Mobile.

"And my boy is at sea, fighting the enemies of his country?" said the Commodore.

"Yes, he are, and making a fortin, too, for he's already been sendin' in prizes, and folks do say he's ther feller to send arter the Rover of the Rigoletts and that blasted pirate, Captain Darke."

"But the Rover of the Rigoletts is the friend of America, Jake."

"He might and he mightn't be; there's no tellin', though he does rain destruction on ther Britishers and never fire on ther stars and stripes, but run like a rabbit, when he could lick ther hind sights off o' some of 'em as chases him."

"But ef he's a Flying Dutchman kind o' craft, an' there is peoples say he are, then Hazel, captain o' ther Sea Trailer, better let him alone, fer it's no use fightin' phantom vessels, Commodore; but I is lettin' out tongue-tackle here by the fathom, when you both wants to be readin' ther log Hazel—I begs his pardon—Capt'n Dean has sent yer. I'll drop in ag'in, folks, and spin yer yarns of what I has heard in Mobile, and what I has see'd there, for it are a great town for ther foolishness o' mankind," and old Jake took his leave, while the Commodore read his letter from Hazel, giving him a short account of his getting to sea and what he had done the three months after.

After praising his boy, the Commodore retired to rest, and then, for the first time, Ruby broke the seal of her letter, and as it forms one of the threads which, woven together, make up this romance, I will give it in full, while my patient readers can picture for themselves poor Ruby, as each word was branded indelibly in her heart and brain:

"ON BOARD U. S. PRIVATEER, SEA
TRAILER, OFF CHANDALEUR ISLANDS,
Sept. 25th, 18—."

"MY DARLING WIFE: When you know *why* I have allowed this long time to elapse before writing to you, then will you not condemn me for my silence; but, as we are running into Mobile for repairs, after a severe action with an English cutter, which we captured, I feel in duty bound to pen you these lines, as they will be the last that I will ever write to you."

"And why, Ruby, my wife—ay, wife in name, but not in love?"

"I will tell you, yes, tell you that upon the evening I sailed away from home, from you, my beautiful bride, I sighted a sail—a vessel, closely reefed, as though to avoid detection, creeping in under the land shadows, and heading up toward Fisherman's Bay."

"A close inspection through my glass proved her to be the mysterious schooner known as the Rover of the Rigoletts."

"Instantly I lowered sail and took to our sweeps, to avoid detection, and followed in her wake, for I knew not why this bold rover had run in toward our peaceful bay."

"At last he noiselessly lowered his anchor, and I ran my lugger close inshore, from whence my men could come at a moment's call."

"From the schooner a boat put out shoreward—a boat with a single occupant, and I sprang out upon the beach, determined to follow this stranger."

"I did follow him, and, from my place in the shadows of the trees, saw that stranger meet you, *my wife*."

"I heard all, Ruby, and God bless you for your noble words, and God bless him for all he said, for you proved that you two respected my honor, and showed your great love for me, though loving each other."

"Yes, Ruby, I heard all, and saw him depart; saw my father come and carry you away, and then the pent-up agony in my heart burst forth in one fearful cry, and I fled back to my lugger."

"I am a strong man, Ruby, but I was like a child, then, and for days and weeks after; but, now I am calm—so calm that my hand pens these lines without a tremor, my eyes gaze on this paper undimmed by a tear."

"But I forgive you, wife of mine, and I forgive him."

"I was the fool to believe that you loved me other than you would your own father."

"But I saved you from the wreck, Ruby, and from that night you nestled in my inmost heart, and, fool that I was, because I loved you so, I believed that you loved me."

"You made the sacrifice not to wound old Hazel, but, now I understand all; and, thus understanding, I tell you my solemn wish, and that is that you one day become the wife of Roy Dean—in reality, *Sir Roy Marmaduke*."

"To-night I write to him, telling him who he is, and also that I know his secret and yours; ay, telling him, as I do you, that I intend to die upon my vessel's deck, and ere long free you from being the wife of Hazel Dean."

"God bless you, Ruby, wife of mine, and, as a man who is looking straight down into his grave, I ask you, when I am gone, to become the wife of Roy, the man you love, and whom I know to be worthy of you, though men do call him the Rover of the Rigoletts."

"God bless you, Ruby, and Roy, and may your lives be unclouded ever, is the prayer of

"HAZEL DEAN."

Another deep sorrow had come to poor Ruby, and, with a bitter moan, wrung from an aching heart, she buried her face in her hands, and wept bitter, scalding tears.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WRECK AND ITS CREW.

"SAIL HO!"

The cry came from the look-out at the mast-

head of one of the sauciest-looking schooners that ever skimmed the seas.

Heading westerly, she was running merrily along, making nine knots out of a seven-knot breeze, and from the earnest watch kept by officers and crew, it seemed as though the horizon was being carefully searched for some expected sail, and the cry of the look-out caused a sensation on deck.

"Whereaway?" called out a handsome young officer, attired in the uniform of a cadet in the United States navy.

"Dead ahead, sir, and it's a wreck, I see now," answered the look-out.

"Ay, ay, I see her, and she shows signals of distress," replied the young officer, handing his glass to a personage who stood by his side, and possessing a face and form of womanly beauty, though there was a worn and haggard look in the eyes.

"She is quite a large craft, sir, but lying low in the water, as though sinking; doubtless caught in the storm of two nights ago, and dismasted," answered the young man, who was attired in a simple blue undress uniform, showing no insignia of rank.

"The wreck has guns on board, sir," and a third person approached, evidently an officer, yet without wearing any sign of his rank.

This last personage seemed a mere boy in years, and his face was effeminate in its beauty, a face to love for its nobleness.

"Ask Mr. Melton to come on deck," ordered the cadet, who in spite of his low rank seemed the officer in charge of the deck.

The one sent for, an iron gray old sea-dog, with a frank, fearless face, soon appeared, and touching his hat politely, said:

"You sent for me, sir."

"Yes; yonder lies a wreck, and she is armed. If she is an enemy she may have men enough on board to capture us should we succor them; see what you think of her."

Brad Melton, who was the acting first-lieutenant of the schooner, gazed a moment through the glass and then said:

"It is the hull of a schooner, and she has had hot work of it, for her sides are badly scarred. I can see about sixty men on her decks, sir."

"About the same number we have. Whatever she be we'll go to her aid, for the wreck seems settling fast."

"Ay, ay, sir," and they are signaling," answered Mr. Melton.

"Then crowd on more sail, for she does seem to be going rapidly."

The order was obeyed and in twenty minutes more the schooner ran to windward of the wreck, which was now seen to be in a sinking condition, terribly cut up with shot and crowded with men.

"Ho, the wreck!" sung out the officer in cadet's uniform.

"Aho! the schooner!" came the answer.

"What wreck is that?"

"The American privateer Sea Triller, of Mobile, Captain Hazel Dean commander. We engaged with the brig-of-war Sleuthhound in attacking a British sloop-of-war, and barely escaped by running into shallow water while the brig went down. What schooner is that?"

All of this was spoken in rapid, seamanlike tones, and to the question the cadet answered:

"The Rover of the Rigoletts!"

The reply created considerable excitement on board the wreck; but the same person who had before spoken called out:

"We were dismasted in the storm two nights ago, and are sinking fast; we have a number of the Sleuthhound's crew on board."

"Ay! ay! We'll send boats for you," and the order was given to lay the schooner to—for she had been circling around the wreck—and to lower away the boats.

In half an hour they were returning from the wreck, loaded to their gunwales.

"Mr. Melton, send the captain of that schooner to my cabin, please," and the cadet descended to his cabin, which was fitted up in the most magnificent style.

A form soon after darkened the companionway and a young man entered, and faced the commander of the schooner.

"Raleigh Reid!"

"By Heaven! you are Roy Dean!"

Such was the greeting that passed between them, and their hands were grasped in friendship.

"And you are the famous captain, the Rover of the Rigoletts?" and Raleigh Reid gazed in admiration upon the splendid-looking man before him, for Roy Dean had now developed into the most perfect manhood.

"No, I am not a captain; I hold a cadetship in the navy, that is all, though I command this schooner," answered Roy, modestly.

"I have believed it for some time, for I saw you at the theater one night in Mobile, only every one believed you dead," and a look of sadness passed over Raleigh's face, for he recalled one whom he had ever loved—Mary Mordaunt.

"But, where is that splendid old Hazel? I so long to see him; and to think of his commanding a privateer!"

"Alas! Roy, poor Hazel, our gallant captain,

is dead—died fighting on the decks of the sloop-of-war, which we boarded."

"Dead! Hazel Dean dead! Would to God I had been the one to go!" and Roy Dean trembled with suppressed emotion, while he added:

"Only a few days ago I received a long letter from him. Ah, me, he kept his word—he threw his life away, Raleigh Reid!"

"He fought with terrible desperation, until he fell by my side. We met the brig-of-war Sleuthhound, and learning that the British sloop-of-war Gladiator had sailed from Nassau short-handed, we ran down on her at night, determined to carry her by boarding, as we both had heavy crews."

"But her terrific fire cut us up, badly, and the brig was sinking when we ranged alongside, while, after we boarded, we found we had been misinformed, for the Englishman had a full crew, and, finding ourselves getting beaten, all who could, rallied, when Hazel fell, and retreated to the schooner, which we at once cut loose and ran for it, as the Britisher was dragged over by the sinking Sleuthhound, which had thrown grapnels, and could not get a fair range at us with her guns. Thus, we escaped, but, weakened by the shot of the enemy, our masts went by the board in the storm that followed, and we lost about half of our men, as did Captain Lennox, also."

"And Albert Mountjoy?" asked Roy, in a constrained tone.

"Is with us, and so is Captain Lennox, who is wounded in the arm."

"He shall come to my cabin. Ho! the deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the handsome young officer of the schooner appeared.

"Skip, ask Captain—"

"Great God! it is as I feared—Mary Mordaunt, you here?"

The speaker was Raleigh Reid, and he half-stepped toward the young officer, while Roy Dean sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Mary Mordaunt it is! Now I recall your face that has so haunted me. Ah, how I have been deceived!"

"And you did not know this to be the woman who saved your life, Roy Dean?"

"Upon my honor, no, Raleigh Reid; I met her, disguised as a boy, in Mobile, and brought her with me as a cabin boy, afterward raising her to a junior officer's rank, though her duties were nominal. Her face has haunted me almost to distraction, because I could not recall it. Oh, Mary, Mary, how you have deceived me!"

Like one in a daze she had stood, her head bent down, her face flushed; but, now she looked up, fearlessly, as she spoke:

"Forgive me; but I was all alone, for my mother died and left me among strangers. I saw you in the streets, and, feeling confident that you were going to sea, I obeyed a certain impulse, cut my hair off and dyed it, as you see, dressed myself as a boy, stained my face and hands, thought none would ever know me, and yet your eyes, Raleigh Reid, have penetrated my disguise."

"The eyes of love are far-seeing, Mary," he said, calmly, and then added, "but, thank God, I find you still true, Mary Mordaunt."

"No, I am Midshipman, or Middy Skip, on this schooner."

"And such must remain, for no one else shall know your secret. Now, please go on deck and tell Captain Lennox and Lieutenant Mountjoy the Rover of the Rigoletts desires to see them in his cabin. Have you any of your officers with you, Raleigh?"

"No, poor Ned Hayes, whom you remember, was killed in action, a month ago."

"Yes, I knew him, and a noble fellow he was."

Skip, as I will still have to call Mary Mordaunt, according to the orders of Cadet-Commandant Dean, soon reentered the cabin, ushering in Fred Lennox, wearing his arm in a sling, and Albert Mountjoy.

"Gentlemen, be seated, and feel that my cabin is at your service, though I regret that your misfortune makes you my guests."

Roy Dean looked from one to the other, a strange smile upon his face, mingled with a look of defiant contempt, and as two men awakening from a dream, they gazed upon him.

At last Fred Lennox spoke, and in a constrained tone:

"Cadet Dean, do I see you, whom I believed at the bottom of the sea, the famous commander of this schooner?"

"Yes, that has won the name of Pirate of the Rigoletts," sneered Albert Mountjoy.

Roy's face flushed, and he said, sternly:

"Be careful, Lieutenant Mountjoy, you are on my vessel, sir, and there are irons here as strong as those on the Sleuthhound."

Albert Mountjoy quailed visibly, and Roy continued, addressing Captain Lennox:

"I have won the name of Rover of the Rigoletts, not Pirate, Captain Lennox, for never has this craft been guilty of a hostile act against the United States, as you well know, and only against the English have I fought, and against pirates."

"This schooner is my property, bought and paid for, and though she has never held a com-

mission, or raised a flag, she is commanded by one whose cadetship has never been recalled; you see the rank I wear."

"I put to sea in her to run down Darke, the Pirate, that I might prove my innocence of the charges against me, and I am now laying my course to where I know I shall find his vessel."

"As the war broke out with Great Britain, I struck a blow, whenever I could, for my country. Now, sir, you know the history of the Rover of the Rigoletts."

"Forgive me, Dean, and humbly I ask it; I feel now, as I have before, that I wronged you sorely. Come, Mountjoy, admit your fault."

"No! I accept your hand, Captain Lennox, but not a word will I hear from Albert Mountjoy, for there is a debt to settle between us one of these days; but, as an officer of your vessel, he shall be treated with respect aboard my schooner. Now, excuse me, for I wish to see that your men are looked after," and Roy Dean left the cabin, followed by Raleigh Reid, leaving Fred Lennox and Albert Mountjoy almost overwhelmed at the change in the tide of affairs.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BITTER END.

"THERE lies the Pirate at anchor, sir."

A whirlwind pouring over the schooner from a cloudless sky and with a calm sea, could not have created more intense excitement than the words of Brad Melton, the second officer of the Rover of the Rigoletts.

The schooner was standing along the coast under easy canvas, watching every curve to catch sight of the vessel of Darke, the Pirate, which was known to be in those waters.

"Keep a couple of points nearer the wind, helmsman," ordered Roy Dean, calmly, though he was very pale.

"Yes, it is the Nemesis, and she sees us, and is hoisting anchor and setting sail to run out. Beat to quarters, Mr. Grayson," and Roy turned to the young officer with the handsome, yet intensely sad and haggard face, and he sprang nimbly to obey the bidding.

"Dean, I beg to offer my services, and those of my officers and crew," said Fred Lennox, coming from the cabin, for it was the third day after the rescue from the wreck.

"And myself and men are with you, Roy," added Raleigh Reid.

"I thank you, gentlemen, but I must fight yonder pirate with my own officers and crew; for that purpose I came to sea."

"If he beats me, then, Captain Lennox, the Rover is under your command; but, until then, I am going to ask that your men be sent down into the hold, though yourself and officers are at liberty to watch the combat from the deck."

They saw that Roy was firm, and said no more.

The course of the schooner was now nearly north-west, with the wind S. W. to half-south, and blowing seven knots, while the Nemesis was running out of the inlet, in which she had been at anchor, with as evident a determination to fight as the Rover had.

After a run of twenty minutes Roy got the wind of the pirate, and forged ahead until he had got abeam, when he bore down as if to cut him off or run him ashore.

The Nemesis then had no other alternative than to stand right on, for she had a lee shore upon her quarter.

Suddenly from the pirate came a puff of smoke, and up went the black flag defiantly, while the shot plowed through a wave, ricocheted, and bounded in upon the deck, staving in a harness cask, and being spent, rolled harmlessly into the waist.

Brad Melton immediately picked it up, remarking:

"This shot was made in Mexico, for it has copper mixed with the iron; shall I answer with the long eighteen?"

"No, let him amuse himself for awhile; I intend to carry by boarding, so call away boarders, as soon as we get within hail," said Roy, coolly, and turning to Midshipman Skip, he said, in a low tone:

"Won't you go down in the cabin?"

"No! Couldn't desert my post in danger, sir," answered the girl, with a light laugh.

"I see Darke distinctly; he is watching us closely, and I think we are evenly matched," remarked the young officer, whom Roy had called Grayson.

"He shall see us more closely soon," was the grim reply, and as his words ended, the pirate fired a broadside.

But it flew wide, and Roy called out:

"Ho, that twenty-four!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Trim his top hamper a little, Benedict."

The old gunner sighted his pivot gun, the schooner vibrated under the loud roar, and a yell broke from the Rovers as it was noticed that the pirate's foretopmast was carried away.

Hauling her wind the Nemesis now boldly steered so as to meet the Rover, both vessels keeping up a brisk fire, and both giving and receiving wounds.

The Rover now also stood straight for the pirate, who kept close up to the wind so as to meet her.

A few moments more the Rover and pirate were close upon each other, the former a little abaft the latter's beam, and springing to the wheel himself, Roy steered so as to strike her quarter and lay her alongside.

Armed now with pikes, pistols and cutlasses, the rovers stood ready to board, forward and aft, there being two parties, one led by Brad Melton, while upon the quarter-deck, anxiously regarding every movement, stood Fred Lennox, Albert Mountjoy and Raleigh Reid.

Near Roy, with sword and pistol drawn, were Grayson and Strip, pale but fearless.

When a cable's length from the pirate Roy Dean's ringing voice was heard, thrilling every heart:

"Boarders, stand by!"

The next moment the rover struck the pirate heavily upon her larboard quarter, and, sliding forward, lay alongside, bow to bow.

Both vessels at the same moment threw grapnels, and Roy Dean leaped upon the quarter-deck of his foe, followed by his men, his clear voice ringing out:

"Boarders away!"

What a scene then followed, of "man's inhumanity to man"—a scene of fierce passions warring for victory—victory that at last fell on the rovers, for they drove the pirates before them like a whirlwind, and cries for mercy resounded upon all sides, notwithstanding the daring efforts of Darke and his lieutenant to stay the tide of defeat.

At length the pirate leaders, who had fought like enraged tigers, were beaten down, wounded and defenseless.

"Hold! Spare that man!"

The cry came in the clear tenor tones of Grayson, and he struck up the pikes aimed at the heart of Darke, the fallen leader.

"Conrad, I gave you your death-wound," and the young officer bent over the chief.

"You! Great God! you, Celeste Grayson!" cried Darke, while his face grew livid with rage.

"Yes, I swore revenge and I have it now; to this man, Roy Dean, once your prisoner for long months, and whom you tried to force by starvation to become as vile as you are, I owe my life, and we swore to track you down; we have done so, Roy Dean and myself."

"Roy Dean, this I owe to you also."

All turned toward the speaker, who had suddenly turned toward them, having been securely ironed.

"Great Heaven! it is Mark Mordaunt," cried Raleigh Reid, who with Fred Lennox and the others had joined the group.

"Who calls the name of Mark Mordaunt?" and the pirate chief asked the question, evidently greatly excited; but before reply could be made Mary Mordaunt rushed forward and threw her arms around her brother, crying:

"Mark! my poor brother! you a pirate?"

"Yes, Mary, and what do I find you?" and he gazed with a look of contempt at her masculine attire.

"You find me true to myself and my honor; I find you a pirate, when the world believed you dead, and this noble man was sentenced to death as your murderer. Oh, Mark, my brother, sorry am I that you are not dead, and happy am I that our poor mother lies in her grave."

"Mother dead?" and the wicked man bent his head in sorrow, for dearly had he loved the mother who had sacrificed all for him—for him who had fled from his home to join a pirate band, not daring to face those he had wronged, when his forgeries and crimes were discovered, and anxious to be considered as dead.

"Is your name Mark Mordaunt?"

To the surprise of all the pirate chief had risen and stood in their midst, eying Mark with a strange look.

"And you are Mary Mordaunt?"

"I am," answered the maiden.

A look of pain, not from his physical suffering, passed over the face of the chief, and then he said firmly:

"A fearful confession for a father to make, is it not, to tell his children that he has dishonored them? But so it is, Mark and Mary; I did not die, as your mother and all supposed, lost when out sailing with Celeste Grayson, my wife's sister; but we let it so be thought, while we fled far away, for we loved each other then."

"She stands there, in man's attire, and I am dying from a death wound she gave me; but it is better so than to be strung up at the yard-arm, as my piratical son will be."

"I ask no forgiveness from any one, but to you, Mary, my daughter, I say—may the Heaven I have outraged forever bless my poor child."

He sunk down again from weakness, while all stood spellbound at the terrible confession they had heard.

A moment more and Conrad Mordaunt, the pirate chief, was dead, and death, sorrow and suffering reigned supreme upon the decks of the Rover of the Rigoletts.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MORDAUNT MANOR RECLAIMED.

THE day following the sea-combat between Darke, the Pirate, and the Sea Cadet, two beautiful schooners lay at anchor in the inlet back of Smuggler's Island, and, upon the deck of the Nemesis farewells were being said, for Roy Dean had presented to Captain Lennox, for the Government, the beautiful vessel as a cruiser, and it had been manned with the brig's crew, and those from the Privateer, Sea Trailer.

And, over to the Naval officer had been given the pirate prisoners, all except Mark Mordaunt, whom, for the sake of his noble sister, Roy had released, and intended setting free at the first port he touched; but his brother-outlaws were to suffer the penalty of the law they had broken.

"And you will land Miss Grayson and Miss Mordaunt at Mobile, to remain there until I free their home from the clutch of that Jew that now holds it?"

"I have promised you, Dean, and they have my deepest sympathy."

And the charges against Mountjoy, which I have made, and which are supported by this man's confession, you will attend to?" and Roy pointed to Dave Tuttle, whom he had held as prisoner, with the liberty of the schooner, ever since his capture of him on the Smuggler's Island.

"Yes; Mountjoy I have already placed under arrest for his persecution of you, and with your written charges, and this man's statements—for he goes with me—I know that my wicked lieutenant will be dismissed in disgrace from the service he has dishonored."

"That will be revenge enough for me. As for Tuttle, he has suffered enough, and I will be glad to have him released after he has given his testimony of his and Mountjoy's persecution of me."

"Raleigh Reid goes with me as second officer, and you shall hear a good account of the Rover of the Rigoletts, until, through your kindness, I command a commissioned craft, and can hoist the stars and stripes."

"Now, farewell, captain; and you, too, my gallant ex-officers, whom I am certainly sorry to give up," and Roy turned to Celeste Grayson and Mary Mordaunt, who were still in their male attire, and white and haggard-looking; but they had turned to each other in their sorrow, instead of looking the one upon the other with hatred.

A warm pressure of the hand all round, good wishes and God-speeds, and the Nemesis sped away, the crews of the two vessels causing the island to echo again with their cheers.

Hardly had the Nemesis disappeared from sight when the Rover raised anchor and flew swiftly away in the direction of the shores where this romance opens.

Running in under the shelter of night, she dropped anchor, and Isaac Goldstein, a Jewish planter, living at Mordaunt Manor, received an unexpected visit that nearly frightened the wits out of him.

An hour's conversation, some writing, signing of papers, and payment of certain moneys, ended the Goldstein proprietorship of Mordaunt Manor, and the Jew, with "money to loan on bond and mortgage," had a free passage to Pensacola, in a craft he ever after swore by Moses's ghost, was a pirate; but, when he landed, he had company in the person of the ex-buccaneer, Mark Mordaunt, and, doubtless realizing the full value of each other's villainy, they went into partnership together; at least, of their after lives there is no chronicle, though of the daring career of the Rover of the Rigoletts, until the end of the war of 1812, history speaks in most favorable terms, and many a yarn is yet spun along the Gulf shores, where old fishermen get together; and the rising generation of boyhood dwelling upon the green shores

"Washed by Mexico's blue waters"

have an ideal hero in Roy Dean, the Sea Cadet, of whom they never tire of talking, for he was a knightly sailor, every inch of him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE war of 1812 had come to an end, and the American shores of the Mexican Gulf and Atlantic Ocean no longer echoed with the roar of guns turned against the hearts of brave Britons.

Merchant vessels again fearlessly swept the seas, and peace and prosperity settled upon the land, for the soldier and the sea-dogs of war were returning to their homes, to live over only in story the wild scenes through which they had passed.

Among the sailors homeward bound were two young men already known to the readers of this romance, and who had won honor and rank in their nation's service, for one held a lieutenant's commission, the other a passed midshipman's warrant for "remarkably distinguished conduct and devotion to their country."

One of these was Roy Dean, the Sea Cadet; the other, Raleigh Reid, who had risen to be the acting first-officer of the schooner, which had been ordered by Government to remain as

the revenue sea sentinel of the Gulf coast, which it had so bravely defended during the war.

Standing upon the deck of their beautiful vessel, which showed many an honorable scar received in action, the two young officers were watching the green shores, dotted here and there with the homes of planters, and upon their faces rested a hopeful look, for, ere long, they would be welcomed by those most dear to them.

"Raleigh, do you remember that plantation?" and Roy pointed to a grand old mansion embowered in a forest.

"Do you think I could ever forget Mordaunt Manor, Roy? Oh no; there are too many recollections hang around that spot for me to easily forget. See, yonder is the old burying-ground, and as the sun falls upon it, I can discern the tomb of the man whom I killed for Mary Mordaunt's sake. Poor Tabor! I would give my own right arm if he was alive to-day."

"Pardon me, Raleigh; I meant not to recall sad memories; only it is from yonder creek I escaped the night my three good friends saved me from a death on the gallows. Ah me, what changes have taken place, for Mary, so long my gallant midshipman, is now Mrs. Fred Lennox, and I learn the young commodore has resigned from the navy and intends living at Mordaunt Manor with his lovely bride."

"So be it! I am content, though I once loved her as few men love women, and she shall ever hold a warm place in my heart. Do you know what has become of her aunt?"

"Yes, I forgot to tell you that, when in New Orleans I went to the Catholic Hospital, to see poor Melton before he died, and found there a Sister Celeste, whom I recognized as Celeste Grayson."

"Poor woman, how sad was her lot in life, loving the husband of her sister, flying with him to share his fate, only, in the end, to be deserted by her pirate lover."

"Yes, a curse seems to have rested upon the name of Mordaunt, for, look how Mark went to the bad, and he was a handsome, splendid fellow, excepting the devil that was in his nature and which he came by honestly from his father; while Mary possessed her mother's noble character. But, by the way, did I tell you what my father had written me about Albert Mountjoy?"

"No; you told me you had some important tidings from home, but we have been so busy, I had forgotten to recall it."

"Well, it seems Captain Mountjoy had determined that Ruby should marry his son, and he left to her Magnolia Retreat, and his moneyed interests to Albert; but when Mountjoy returned home it seems, after his dismissal from the navy, for his persecution of you, Ruby refused to accept the place and transferred it to him, which, like all else he had owned, was lost at the card-table and was sold by the gambler who won it for a mere song, and old Daniel Dean bought it in, at Ruby's request, and they went there to live."

"I had not heard of this. You know I have no correspondence with any one at home," remarked Roy, sadly.

"But that is not all, for Mountjoy, penniless, and, I suppose, envious of Mrs. Dean's possessing the property, arranged a kidnapping affair, determined to carry her off, some say to get from her a large ransom for her release, with which sum he intended leaving the country; but his plans miscarried through the pluck of Nellie Hayes, whom you remember, and whose gallant defense of you, with that antiquated old horse-pistol, I shall never forget."

Both young men laughed heartily at the remembrance of the scene, and Raleigh continued:

"It seems three masked men lay in wait to kidnap Mrs. Dean, as she rode along the beach, as she does, father writes, every afternoon."

"They had a lugger awaiting in the Magnolia inlet, and suddenly sprung forward and seized her horse by the bridle; but, as luck would have it, Nellie Hayes was spending a few days with Ruby, and was riding a wild colt that would not go down the path to the beach, so she rode along upon the cliff, and was just above the spot when the masked men sprung from their place of concealment."

"Instantly she cried loudly for help, and the men were forced to fly, for they distinctly heard an answer in a man's voice; it was Commodore Lennox, returning from town, and his wife was in the carriage with him."

"Springing from the vehicle, a new rifle which he had just purchased in his hand, he ran to where Nellie was, and, mounting her horse, which she gladly yielded to him, he rode off like the wind."

"Coming in sight of the flying men, he forced the horse down the cliff path, and reached the spot just as the kidnappers were about to spring into their pirogue to row out to the lugger."

"Instantly they turned upon the brave commodore, but he shot one down, and, springing to the ground with clubbed gun, attacked the others, one of whom fell under a blow that crushed his skull, and the other sprang into the pirogue and escaped in the lugger, that at once put to sea. Well, the sequel is soon told; the

man shot by Commodore Lennox was *Albert Mountjoy*, and the one clubbed to death was *Dave Tuttle*, two boon companions in villainy."

"Yes, and they met a fitting death. Poor Ruby! I am glad indeed that she escaped."

"Guess you are still sweet in that quarter, Roy. Well, I don't blame you, for they say she is the most beautiful woman on the Gulf coast, and all the men are in love with the beautiful young widow, who is not yet twenty, you know."

Roy Dean made no reply, but turned his eyes wistfully upon *Magnolia Retreat*, opposite which plantation the schooner was now sailing.

Half an hour after the fleet vessel dropped anchor in Fisherman's Bay, and the two friends rowed ashore, leaving a junior officer in command.

For a "consideration" Raleigh Reid soon found a horse to carry him over to B—, where his father was still pastor of the church, and Roy strolled about listlessly, promising to come over the next day to see him.

"And you'll have hundreds of visitors, Roy, for every one will wish to see the famous Rover of the Rigoletts; but, good-by, and be certain to come to-morrow," and Raleigh rode away, leaving his commander to ponder upon the strange scenes and thrilling adventures that had come to him in the past, since that night, nearly fifteen years before, when he had been rescued from the wreck by Hazel—poor Hazel Dean, who had sacrificed his life for the happiness of Roy and Ruby.

Lost in painful thought he had wandered almost mechanically up the path to his old home.

It was closed and desolate, but the flowers about the door bloomed in beauty, showing that some tender hand still cared for them.

Seating himself upon the old porch he gazed around him, his heart aching with the flood of recollections that came over him, all unmindful that a person had come from around the house, her hand filled with flowers, which she had gathered at the plot near the spring.

At sight of a person in full uniform she had started, half turned, and then stood in silence, gazing upon him.

She was in riding-habit, that fitted her superb form to perfection, and her face was shaded by a dove-colored hat with plume.

Her hands were gauntleted, and one held her skirt and whip, while the other was filled with flowers fresh plucked.

Though she stood in shadow, her face was fully revealed, and as beautiful as an artist could desire for his ideal work, while upon it rested a flush of glad surprise, mingled with doubt.

Presently the earnest eyes fastened upon him made their presence felt, and Roy turned, and in an instant was upon his feet.

"Ruby!"

"Oh, Roy!"

The flowers fell uncared for upon the ground, and Ruby Dean and Roy Dean had met once more.

"Come, Ruby, let us take a walk."

The speaker was Roy Dean Marmaduke, no longer a naval officer, but a planter on the Gulf shores, and his home was *Magnolia Retreat*, for six months after the war closed, he had married the beautiful widow of his adopted brother, Hazel, after having gone to England and proven his right and title to the Marmaduke estates.

But the noble title did not lure him away from the land he had fought so nobly for, and returning to America, he had married the one woman of his love, and settled down to a quiet life, with his old commander, Commodore Lennox, upon one side of him, and Raleigh Reid (who had married pretty *Nellie Hayes*, and, with his prize-money, had built an elegant home) upon the other.

"Come, Ruby," he again called out, and the young wife, growing more beautiful, if it were possible, each day, threw on a sun-hat, and together the two strolled down the highway.

"Yonder, in the distance, Ruby, is where we were wrecked that night," said Roy, and Ruby answered sadly:

"Poor Hazel!"

"And see, there is where I sprung from the cliff to your aid, when the tide came in and caught you and Bonnie Bess."

"Yes, and down there on the beach is where *Albert Mountjoy* attempted to kidnap me, and this is the very spot where *Mark Mordaunt's* dead horse was found, which led to your arrest as his murderer."

"Ah, how these scenes crowd upon me now, and especially here do I recall what happened," and they turned into the little inclosure, where slept the dead, and where Ruby had listened to two tales of love in the far bygone.

Suddenly they stopped, for a man knelt before a marble tomb—a tall pine, carved in marble, and broken off at the top, to indicate that some brave life had ended ere its career had well begun.

Upon the ground before it bent a human

form, a man, seeming bent with age and with snow-white hair and beard, and whose eyes were fixed upon the inscription, which read:

"To

"CAPTAIN HAZEL DEAN,

who fell in action on an enemy's deck, which he had gallantly boarded, and who met a noble death in defense of his FLAG and COUNTRY.

"Though his remains lie beneath the Gulf's deep blue waters, his soul has gone aloft, and to his memory here on earth this tribute is erected

"BY

"ROY AND RUBY."

"Great God! My tomb, and erected by those two! Oh, Heaven, why did I return here?"

The words broke from the man's lips in utter anguish, and in an agony of despair and sorrow he fell forward upon the cold marble, his hands clasped upon his forehead.

"Hazel Dean!"

White as the face of a corpse now were both Roy and Ruby, for they had heard every utterance from that old man's lips.

"Hazel!"

At the second calling of his name the man started, looked wildly around, and cried:

"Who called me by that name? I am not Hazel Dean, for he died years ago—fell in action on his enemy's deck. Don't you see how the inscription reads?" and he shrunk from them, as though to hide his face.

But in spite of that long, snow-white and unkempt hair and beard, and his bent form and tattered clothing, those two knew that Hazel Dean stood before them, though a shattered wreck of his former self.

"Hazel, I know you, and Ruby knows you! Come, there is your home; here is your wife; but, as there is a God in Heaven, we believed you dead, or I never would have asked Ruby to be my wife.

"Come, go with us, and then I will leave you forever—go far away to other lands, and Ruby will cheer your declining years and bring back joy to your broken life."

Roy spoke without a tremor in his voice, and as firmly Ruby said:

"Yes, Hazel, come with me, and I will do my duty."

Then he turned upon them, his hands outstretched, while he cried, piteously:

"Forgive me, oh forgive me! I meant not to come, and yet I could not help it. Yes, I did fall, as all believed, dead; but I was only wounded, and my strong constitution caused me to rally and live through all, even to my loathsome prison life in a dungeon.

"At last I came out of darkness into light; but you see what is left of me—a mere wreck, a dying man, for I had barely strength to reach this spot, for back at the hamlet I heard all, though no one knew me. I will go away, and—"

"Hold him up, Roy, for he is falling."

Roy sprung forward and caught him and placed him gently upon the ground, while Ruby started for aid; but he called her back, and said, faintly:

"God forever bless you two. Bury me here."

They were his last words, for his eyes closed in death.

THE END.

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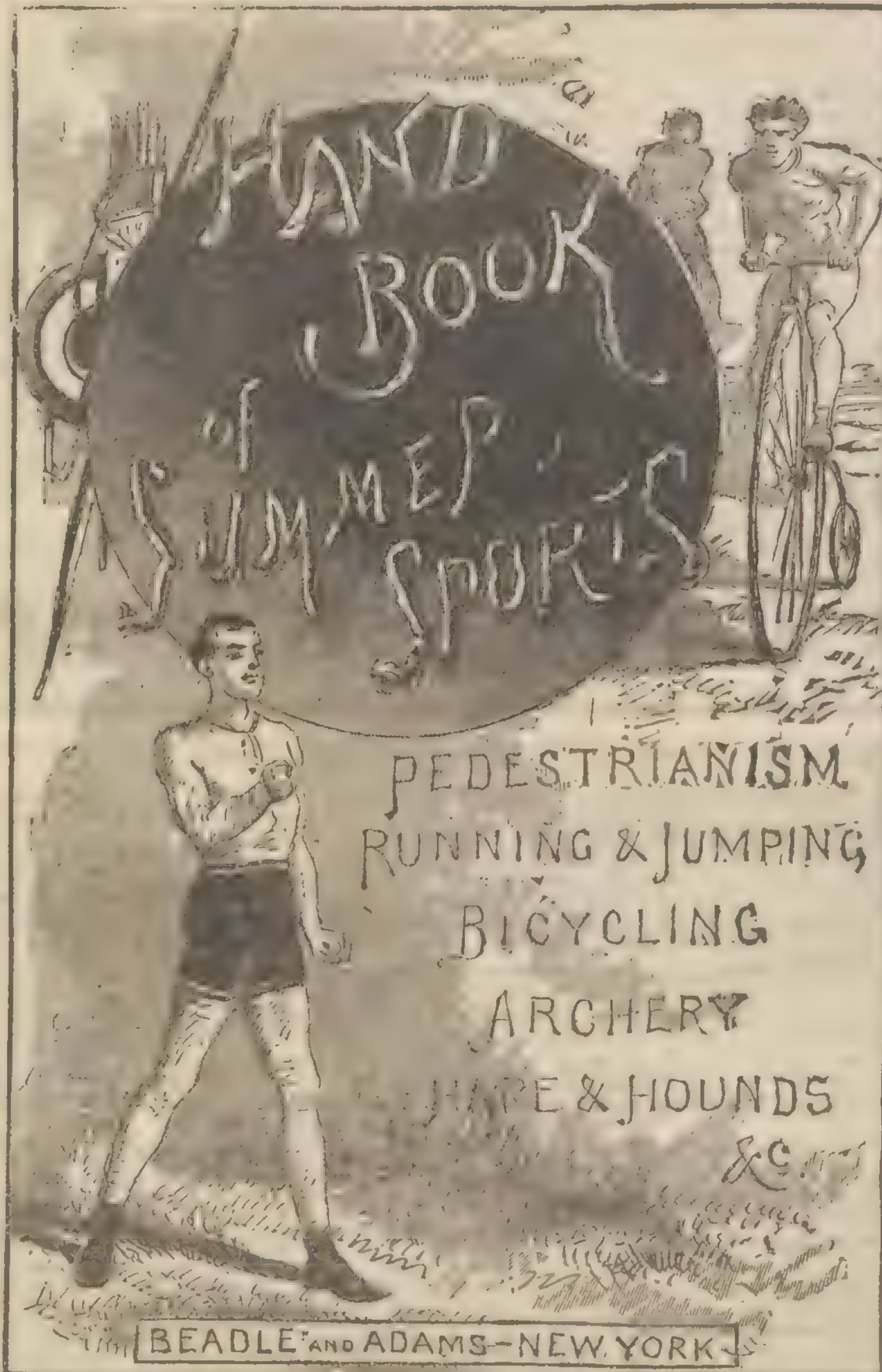
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